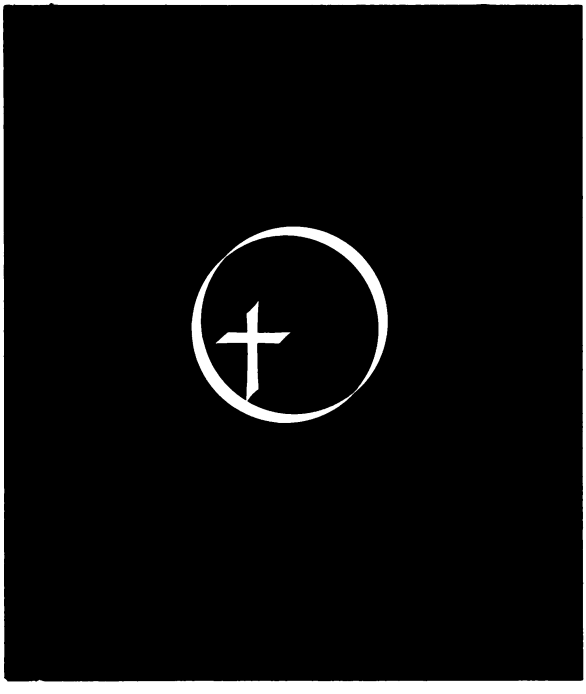

THE HAUNTED HEARTHSTONE.

HOME LIFE;

OR,

A Peep across the Threshold.

BY

MRS. CAROLINE A. SOULE.

WITH

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BILLINGS.

"A stone for thy home-altar, saidst thou?"
"Ay. A corner stone."
"Build it upon thy *hearth*. Thou canst not find
Upon the earth another with so firm a base,
Or one that when the fire is lit will glow
With holier light." OLD PLAY.

"His wee bit ingle blinkin bonnily."
BURNS.

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PREFACE.

"Another new book?"

"Ay,—another."

"And what about, pray?"

"O, read and see,—or stay,—here is the one who wrote it. Ask her, and ask her, too, what inclination led her to add another to the many volumes now before the public."

We have named our little volume Home-Life, or a Peep across the Threshold, because it is a grouping of scenes that happen, and characters that have existence, every day around the hearthstone. Many of the events here transcribed are faithful records from our own diary, and all have more of truth than fiction in them. Some of the characters, too, are portraits, feebly done in

pen and ink, of persons who are memories now, and the rest have semblances in every place. So much for name.

Why we wrote it, is more difficult to tell. Many things urged us on. To gratify the perhaps too partial love of one no more on earth first prompted us to try if we could write a story, — picture upon paper some of the incidents we had gathered up in our brief pilgrimage. Afterwards we wrote, partly because we learned to love the habit, and partly from an earnest hope that thus we might give back to the literary world a little of the pleasure and the profit it had and was still giving us, and furnish to those who will not read a moral unless it is draped in pleasant fiction, a few of the many that centre on the hearthstone, and thence diverge through every scene of life to brighten and to bless.

We wrote of home-life, because our home has ever been our world, and thus we are familiar with its lights and shadows, its pleasant ingle nooks and its dark corners, its singing voices and its falling tears; because we have thought much on the secret influences which

gladden or sadden human homes, and felt that if those were pure and earnest, all would be well within and without; that if a peep across the threshold showed a *happy* home — parents true to their holy charges — children faithful in filial duty — brothers and sisters cherishing closely the affectional tie — masters, mistresses and friends acting out the promptings of their better natures — we might cross the sacred stepping-stone and look thence upon a world of beauty, peace and joy. Until home-life be what God meant it should be, what humanity pleads it may be, — a foretaste of *heavenly* life, — it is useless to look for purity and happiness in the world's great thoroughfares. We must gladden the heart ere the lip can sing, and to gladden the heart we must make it clean.

If we could know that one spirit to whom is given the guidance of the young and helpless, the poor and sorrowing, should be roused, for a little while, from apathy to earnest thought and decisive action by the perusal of these life-pictures, we should feel satisfied and glad that we had written. That may not be, per-

haps, yet we will hope that those who read will feel, when they close the volume, that it has been time pleasantly, if not profitably spent.

Granby, Ct., August, 1854.

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THE HAUNTED HEARTHSTONE.

All houses wherein men have lived and died
Are haunted houses.

"Do I believe in haunted houses?" said the aged woman, speaking rather to herself than to the fair, sweet grandchild, who nestled at her feet and looked up so earnestly into the wrinkled face. "Yes, indeed I do. There 's not a house in this whole village, nor for miles around, but that to me is haunted, — none, though, so much as this."

"Haunted," continued she, speaking the word so slowly that a solemn emphasis seemed to rest on each letter, "yes, yes, there are such things as haunted spots." And then she dropped her knitting, took off her glasses, wiped her eyes, and, leaning back in her arm-chair, seemed lost in a sad yet holy communion with the earlier passages of life.

It was a dark, stormy winter's night. The wind howled fiercely around the old farm-house, drifting the snow high on the window-sills, fastening it to the rough panels of the doors, sifting it through the crevices of the mossy roof, and heaping it up like giants' graves all along the pathway and throughout the garden. But in doors all was bright and of a

summer warmth. The huge back-log had been dragged in ere twilight, and was now slowly dropping into coals; while the flames from the lighter wood, which every few moments was cast on with so free a hand, blazed high and ruddy, and cast a genial light and glow into the darkest corner, scintillating on the time-darkened ceiling like polar flashes on a midnight sky.

It was one of those bitter nights that make the hearthstone the "bonniest" spot on all the earth,—a night when the sheltered lift up their hearts in thanksgiving, when the homeless bow in supplication; a night when children kneel before the fire and read bright prophecies in the living coals, when the aged draw their chairs yet nearer to the blaze and warm their shivering memories; a night when all turn their backs to the darkness, their face to the light.

"It is a night to make ghost-stories relish well,—do, grandmother, tell me one."

The head of the young girl rested on the knees of the aged lady, and, as the latter lost the thread of her dream, and looked down, she could see an enthusiastic eagerness pictured in the bright blue eye, a longing for some tale of romance, that, dropping into her heart, should vivify its dormant passions. She hesitated a few moments, and then, tenderly caressing the one lone pet of her bosom, she said:

"I will tell you a story about a haunted hearthstone; and, Lizzie, it will be no tale of fiction. The

plot is drawn from living memories, the scene is laid — here, here." But her tremulous voice now quivered with added notes, and, after a moment's stern but useless effort at self-control, it burst into sobs so loud and wild that they rivalled the cries of the winter wind.

The young girl seemed not much frightened, and spake no soothing words, but only clasped the hand she had taken as she asked the story with a tighter grasp, showering it with kisses.

The paroxysm did not continue long; but, as it passed away, she rose and turned her trembling steps toward the dark, cold bed-room, and, going in, closed the door, and was absent a long while. The tears streamed down Lizzie's cheeks when left alone, and it was evident that the aged relative had some secret sorrow over which she mourned intensely.

When she returned and again seated herself in her usual chair, only drawing it a little closer to the fire, there was such a calm, beautiful, spiritual look, expressed upon her countenance, that you could not but fancy she had conversed with the angels.

Without any allusion to the past, without any preface, she began, after a silence of perhaps a half-hour, the promised story. Handed down to me, it reads like this:

It was a night much like this; perhaps forty years or more have passed since its winds blew and its snows drifted, since its cold palsied and its dark-

ness frightened. Beside this same hearthstone,—the same, only that then it was not worn so smooth, for the house then had tested but thirty instead of as now seventy and odd winters,—an aged man and his wife sat before the blazing fire, striving to wile away the long evening hours. There were not then, as now, daily mails coming into even our remote little village, freighted with news in every shape; the press did not teem, as now, with magazines and books; it was rare to see a newspaper in this old kitchen, and rarer any volume, save THE ONE. The old man had studied that some time, and carefully replaced it,—the Bible did not then, as now, grow dusty, while other books were thumbed to pieces. He had eaten his apples, drank his cider, and cracked some walnuts for his wife, whose teeth were sounder than his own; and now sat close as he could draw himself to the flames without scorching his home-spun garments, nodding good-by to the sky-bound sparks. The old lady had rolled up her knitting, and, with her broken-fork,—in those days they had not heard of nut-picks,—with her two-tined fork, which had lost one of its members, sat digging out, with a patience worthy of the gold miners of these times, the rich, sweet kernel.

Suddenly she dropped both fork and nut, and in another instant started to her feet, her pan falling from her lap, and threatening many a grease-spot on the well-scoured floor. Hastening to her husband,

she shook his shoulders, saying, "Wake up quick, and listen."

Half-frightened, he jumped, and came near setting his stockinged feet upon the living coals; but his watchful wife, drawing him off the hearth, whispered, a little wildly, "Listen, now! don't you hear it?"

"Hear what?" said he, still half asleep.

"Why, the sound, like a child crying. There, there, now it goes again! Do go to the door."

The old man, now fully roused, stood with his hand to his ear, the right one,— the left had been deaf for many a year. "It's the wind, wife. Don't you know it? It's a fashion it has of crying when it's cold."

"It was n't the wind," said she, solemnly, with a little nervous agitation yet visible in her face. "I know the cry of the wind; it never made a sound like that. There," and she clung to him, quivering like a dead leaf, "don't you hear it?"

He certainly did hear something that sounded like the cry of a child; and now it did not die away, as it had when his wife had noticed it, with a single sob, but lengthened into screams. But how it could sound so near, or whence come, was a mystery, for the house stood then far away from any other house; but it was a child's cry, that was certain.

"I will go and see," said he, summoning courage to his somewhat faint heart, and he turned to the door. His wife followed close and fast on his steps. As he withdrew the little slip of wood that fastened

the latch,—there was n't then a bolt or lock in the town,—and opened the door, a bundle, so it seemed, though of what it was hard to guess, fell into the room with a heavy, lifeless sound. The wind blew a white sheet over it, ere they could again fasten the latch.

Half horror half wonder struck, they dragged the coarse blanket to the hearth, and, unrolling it, discovered a woman and child: the latter struggling to free itself from its many wrappers, and screaming with all its might; the former motionless as a corpse, with lips as ashy and cheeks as sunken.

A half-hour's charity to the babe, who seemed to have seen a twelvemonth, completely revived it; and it lay on a pillow, with its little white feet stretched to the fire, as happy as love could have made it, cooing as sweetly as though nestling on a mother's warm bosom. But it took longer to bring back a pulse to the wrist of its pale protector; and many times did the good Samaritans turn from her, leaving the sheet drawn over her, as we cover a corpse. But a sigh, so faint that it seemed a dying breath, at length encouraged them, and they plied restoratives till satisfied she would yet live.

But it was many a weary day ere she could leave her bed; and when at last she stole from it, and sat up in the old lady's rocker, and lulled her baby with old songs, she seemed to her watchers more like a spirit than a sick, sad stranger. But gradually, through their tender nursing, she recovered strength, and not only

tended her child, but assisted the old lady in many of her domestic duties. But she said very little,—less than they could have wished; for in their hearts they longed to know her story. They knew she was a sinner,—knew it by the meek, penitent way in which she hung her head when they read the Bible, at morn and night; knew it by the stained face she raised to them after each prayer. But they loved her all the more, or rather were all the kinder to her. And, though she revived memories that it was agony to bear, they folded her to their affections as they would their own lost lamb, had she not gone ere they could reach her.

The winter passed, and still the stranger lingered, filling with her little one a small place in the house, but a large one in each aged heart. One bright, golden spring morn, after assisting in the morning as had become her habit, she went into the bed-room with her babe, and soon reäppeared wrapped in the same coarse garments they had worn on that frosty night of their arrival.

"Give her one kiss, grandma, and you, grandpa," said she, holding the child first to one and then to the other wrinkled face; "and now, father, mother, —do let me call you so this once!—give the unwedded mother one, and we will go, and wherever we go I will pray for you, and she shall be taught to;" and she rushed wildly to the door.

They stopped her, caught her child, and pleaded with her to stay. "Be to us still what you have

been so long, our daughter, and do not take from us our darling baby. We should die without her."

Great drops gathered on to the still pale brow, while tears rushed down her cheeks, and her lips quivered with a fearful agony. She wrung her hands, she beat her heart, she lashed her limbs — she seemed like one who is half mad.

"Give me the child a moment," she exclaimed; and, clasping it wildly to her bosom, she bathed its smiling face with drops wrung from her keenest woe, then kissed it passionately, and held it out to them. Both stretched their hands, and the little one, with an equal love, gave to the one its right and to the other its left hand, and, upheld between them, crowed and screamed in baby glee.

"She is the child of sin," said the mother, with a solemnity that awed for the moment the carol of her babe; "the child of sin, but herself pure and holy as was ever the offspring of a wedded tie. Will you keep her so, if I leave her here? If she goes with me, she will not long be an angel, unless, indeed, God takes her; would he had taken her mother when she was as young! If she stays with you, she may ever be one. Will you keep her?" and she screamed the words into their ears, as though she would have made their inmost nerves awaken.

"We will, we will!" said they; "and more; we will keep you, too. Stay with us — stay! You shall be to us a daughter — replace the one we lost; we will be parents. It shall be home to us four."

"I cannot," said she, wildly. "Your daughter was a stainless girl — I am dyed in sin!" and she shook with agony.

And so did those she spoke to, and tears as hot as those that had scalded her face now flooded theirs. Awhile they wept as though their hearts would break; then gathered calmness, and, while the old lady clasped the two hands of the Magdalen, the old man placed his hand upon her head, and spake.

"Our daughter fled from us while in the beauty of her girlhood — fled with a stranger, who wooed her by false words to a fearful sin. The child of our old age, it almost broke our hearts; and we came here, far away from the haunts of early years, to spend the remnant of our days in a struggle to forget. We cannot forget, but we long since forgave; ay, before we heard that she was dead. We have learned to be happy, even with the memory of our trial ever before us. But we miss the hopes that were born with her, and we would cherish you and your babe as we should her and hers, had she come back ere she repented, as they told us, and died."

The old man's voice was hushed. There was no sound but that of sobs, save when the baby cooed its little love-song. A cry of agony burst from the white lips of the stranger, as, loosening the hands that held her, she fell at the feet of those who had been so true,— a cry, and then words.

"Father! mother! she did not die,—she lives! I am she — your Lizzie — your lost, found child!"

Let the curtain drop. It is a scene too holy for any but the sight of God and angels.

"Yes," said the old grandmother, "it was their long-lost, and, as they thought, dead Lizzie. She herself had forged the story of her death, to secure herself in the sin she had learned to love. But, when, after years of wretched crime, she became herself a mother,— when she felt upon her breast the touch of pure and holy lips,— then she became herself again, and felt how much, how deeply she had sinned; and she longed to have her babe nurtured as she had been. It was long ere she could escape from her sinful associates; but she at length succeeded, and reached, as I have told you, her father's house. She had meant to have concealed herself till they were asleep, and then left the babe and gone her way; for she had no hope that they would cherish her again —for, O, she was very vile. But the cold was so intense she dared not leave the child, but was forced to keep it to her breast; and, worn and wearied with her long and tedious struggle with the drifts, at length became benumbed, and could no longer still the cries of her little one; and thus was brought back to love, to home, to Christ, by the voice of the angel on her heart."

The old lady ceased her story, and there was no word spoken for a long while. Then the young maiden broke it, saying,

"And what became of them all?"

"The two aged parents lived near a score of years, happy in the love of their restored child, and in the caresses and tender care of her little one. They lie buried in the old church-yard. The grandchild lived to be a blessing to her mother for five-and-twenty years; then passed away, leaving a little one to make good her place. Motherless ere it had seen the face of her who gave it birth, it was fatherless ere the year was out." Another long pause.

"Yes, it is a haunted hearthstone, this. Those aged Christians, that beautiful young mother, that noble father — they haunted it; not as did ghosts of olden time, making it a weird spot for the heart, but with such holy memories that the hour spent in communion with them seems like a visit in the 'better land.'

"Hearthstones are ever haunted; but few, like this, have angels for their guests."

The anniversary of that bleak winter's night came round. The fire burned as brightly as before, the room was as warm and rosy; but the young girl kneeled now before the fire. There was no lap for her to rest her head upon — the old arm-chair was empty. The hearthstone was haunted by another spirit — a spirit that had *sinned*, *suffered*, and been *forgiven*.

THE PATIENT HOPE.

"O DEAR! O dear!" sobbed the child, as she climbed, with sore and weary feet, the long stairs that led from the kitchen to the attic, sped across the unplastered lumber-way, to her little, low, dark bedroom, and cast herself, with passionate haste, upon the straw pallet. "O dear, if some one would only love me!" And then she buried her wet face in the pillow, and wept as though her little heart would break.

But a child's grief, though never so intense, seldom lasts very long. It may come often, but it is like the showers of April, soon chased by sunbeams. And so that little, lone orphan girl, after the first wild gush of sorrow, suffering the tears to dry upon her cheeks as best they might, lifted her tangled hair from her brow, and, seating herself beside the one small window, watched, with an earnest, thoughtful countenance, the many stars that twinkled in the almost cloudless sky; and seemed soon to have forgotten her troubles, and be entirely lost in communion with the glorious night-scene.

After a long while her lips moved, and she murmured softly to herself, "O, if I were only a star!

Then, not only one, but so many would love me, and I should be so happy! I thought, last week, when Miss Mary's lover sent her the beautiful bunch of rose-buds, and I saw her kiss them so, and talk to them, and wear them so close to her heart, that I should like to be a flower, because then somebody would love me. But now I believe I would rather be a star; for, after the roses began to grow brown and die, she did n't seem to care anything about them. And perhaps, even if I was that dear little violet which I saw the other day, though somebody might love me a little while, as soon as I began to fade they would neglect me, and when I fell to pieces forget all about me. But, if I was a star, *I could never die.* If they loved me once, they would love me forever. O, if God had only made me one!" And then she threw herself again upon the bed, and wept herself to sleep.

Poor child! it was hard that one with a soul so beautiful, so full of yearnings after the true and good; with a mind so keenly sensitive, so rich with upward aspirations; with a heart so bountiful in tendrils — that such a one should be only a little bound girl, should be forced to give up eight of life's years for the paltry pittance of food and clothes, should go weeping day and night for human love!

Her employers, wealthy people, had taken her from the Orphan Asylum, two years before, when she counted ten summers. They had done it, so said report, as a deed of charity. But was it charity to

take that young, sweet girl from the little mates she had learned to love; from the teachers who had spoken kindly to her, and sought to answer her eager inquiries after knowledge; from the well-lighted spacious, comfortable sleeping, dining and school-room; from the green play-ground and flower-scented garden — and thrust her into a dark, back kitchen, where never a ray of sunlight peered, and keep her there from the dusk of morning to the dusk of night, without a loving word, a pleasant smile, or a single precious book, and then send her off to sleep alone in a little dark attic-room, stived in the summer, and frosty in the winter — was it charity? If so, Heaven speed the day when the word is obsolete!

A mystery hung over the birth and infancy of little Ella. She had been found, one cold morning in the early days of autumn, almost dead, upon the lifeless bosom of a beautiful woman, whose countenance, though it indicated youth, was yet deeply lined with the touches of, as it seemed, heart-crushing grief. Her garments, though scanty in number and better suited to July than October, were yet of the richest materials; while the shawl which she seemed in the agonies of the last moment to have folded about her little one was a costly web from an Eastern loom. In the pocket of her dress was found a richly-embroidered purse, empty of money, but with a couple of broken cards in it, upon one of which the surname had been entirely defaced, but the words "Mrs. Albert" were legible; upon the

other of which was engraved "Albert La G——," the last letters having been, it would appear, erased carefully by the knife. On her wedding finger was a plain, heavy gold ring, with the inscription, "Albert to Ella." Attached to a ribbon that hung about her neck was a golden locket, with the miniature of a middle-aged man upon the one side, and in the other a blended braid of hair, the hues a rich jet, and a soft dark-brown. Upon this, too, was inscribed, "Albert to Ella." But no clue could be obtained as to her surname, her real condition, or the place whence she had travelled; for it was evident she was a worn-out, foot-sore stranger.

The magistrate before whom the little motherless girl was taken caused an advertisement of the facts to be inserted in the local papers; but, after some weeks of waiting, as no response was made to them, it was concluded she must be some deserted, unwedded mother, with none upon the earth to care for her. So the child, christened Ella Albert, was consigned to the Orphan Asylum; and the few relics found with her, and which might serve at some future year to identify her, given in sacred trust to the matron.

Mrs. Mann was one of those few, rare women who seem fitted by nature for so responsible a trust as that she held. Never were little ones in their own home more kindly cared for, as far as physical health is concerned; and few find under the parental roof more judicious mental and moral training. True, many times the children sent to her were so loath-

some with hereditary ills, both bodily and spiritual, that she could not, without an inward shudder, take them to her heart; yet she gave them ever the same sweet, Christ-like smile, the same gentle, loving words, as were bestowed upon those more favored in their organization.

When little Ella, only about two years old, was placed within her arms, her heart encircled her at once. She was such a gentle, quiet, beautiful creature, with such a delicate hue on her cheek, such a dreamy hazel eye, such a spiritual look about her brow, such finely-curved, rich lips, seldom ringing with the wild laugh, but at every tender caress dimpling into added beauty; she was so loving, folding her slender arms about the neck of the lady, as soon as she was taken, and nestling so like a bird close to her bosom, that she was at once an idol to the benevolent matron.

Too many so situated would have spoiled her by over-indulgence. But Mrs. Mann was judicious in the bestowment of her favors, even upon that little one, who every year entwined herself yet closer to her affections. She knew what the lot of the child sent to the Orphan Home is most apt to be; and so she drove back the yearnings of her heart to fit that beautiful creature for a station meet for her, and only strove the more assiduously to train her so that she might go through the severe discipline which would probably befall her soon with a pure heart and clean hands.

One prompting of her heart she did obey, though in that she was actuated by a purer and higher motive than merely selfish affection. When, as was the case almost every week, there came visitors to select from the orphaned group children to be bound to them, apprenticed not to love, but labor, she kept little Ella secluded in her own private rooms. She knew the constitution of the child was such that a premature grave would be her lot, if confined too early to the tedious duties which ever burden those taken from the asylum; and she felt, too, that, though that grave might be a holy resting-place for the beautiful pet of her bosom, there was yet so much more of the angelic in her nature than we see often developed in humanity, that it was her duty to save her to the world, if possible, for angels are indeed few and far between in this earthly sphere.

Until she was ten, the good matron succeeded in keeping her with herself; but then she was forced to give her up to the wealthy Browns, who, as they said, took the poor, impoverished, deeply-smitten child from the cold charities of a public institution, to the warm and beautiful ones which cluster around the hearthstone of a *home*. So they said; but they thought only, in tearing her from the holy associations and blessed memories of that orphan's refuge, to save the pay of a second servant, and devote the unexpended wages to the toilet wants of their young, gay daughters.

Like severing mother and child was the unclasping

of Ella's heart-strings from the dear one who had supplied so truly the place of the beautiful dead. But, though both suffered intensely, the orphan's pangs were the keenest, her sorrow was the most hopeless. Childhood is instinctive in its perceptions, and Ella felt, when looking into the countenance of her new protector, that, though she might be tenderly attached to her own birdlings, she would never think of loving her, the little bound girl.

"O, if they would only love me!" sobbed she, on the lap of her mother-friend, the night ere she left her. "If they would only love me as you have, I could go; I would wipe my eyes now, and never cry again; but they won't, they won't, they will never love me! O, if I were only dead!"

"Little Ella does n't talk right now," said the lady, soothingly, straining her to her heart, and strangling the agony that her words gave birth to. "They may not love you at first; but. if you always do your duty faithfully, if you love them, they will by and by love you; or, even if they should n't, there will come some one to do so. Then go with a brave, true heart, my darling, and ever, come what will, cherish *a patient hope.* God will some day fulfil it; and, the further off he thinks best to put that day, the more blessed will be the fulfilment."

With the benediction of every heart in the establishment, and with the patient hope deep-seated in her own, the little bound girl went her weary way. Like going from noon to midnight, and that midnight

too that has upon its front no twinkling star or pallid moon, seemed the exchange of homes. For a few months, indeed, there crept now and then a sunbeam upon her darkened path, and her soul vibrated to the music gush of joy. Her kind, faithful friend, Mrs. Mann, did not forget her, but called upon her every time an errand brought her to the city, seemingly to learn how her employer was suited with her charge, but purposely to make glad and happy a few moments of her darling's tedious hours. Twice, too, she was permitted, at the earnest solicitations of her old friend, to spend the Sabbath with her. Green spots were those holy days ever after in her memory, —green and beautiful, not mottled with sunshine, but radiant with broad, golden streams,—not tuneful with snatches of song, but musical with full, rich choruses.

But, ere her eleventh summer had come, that beam, so vivid with light from heaven, vanished, or rather was hidden from the visible eye by the pall of death. Mrs. Mann grew suddenly and fearfully ill. In the early stages of her sickness, realizing herself that she must die, she sent for Ella, and communicated to her the story of her childhood, and gave up the relics which she had kept so long as a holy trust. Knowing the nature of Ella as she did, she had forborne to do so at an earlier date, and would have waited yet longer, but for the sudden prostration of life. Well did she know that the sensitive heart of her darling would suffer keenly at the tale

of her mother's death; and that, with the most distant idea of ever finding her father, a hope that would be an agony would root itself in her young bosom. And as she had feared, so was the result. Ella, at the conclusion of her story, was borne fainting from the room, and, when she revived, added to the patient hope that she had cherished now for nearly a year, that the inmates of her adopted home or some one else would love her, was another equally patient, but if possible more intense, the hope of being some day clasped to a father's heart.

As soon as the sod had fallen on the cold bosom of her friend, ere she had time to water that new grave with half the tears that choked her, she was returned to her kitchen-home, her attic-nook, and betwixt them, in weary, unflagging, uncomplaining toil, she passed the seven years that yet remained of bondage. Household duties, it is well known, though they be even the labors of love, have yet a tread-mill step to them. What must they be, then, to those kitchen and chamber drudges, who go through them, year in and year out, whether sick or well, sad or happy, with never a smile to cheer them, never a love-tone to fascinate, never a touch to lighten the load! Much need, indeed, of heavenly bounties have the poor servant-girls; life is indeed to them a weary load.

When four years of slavery had passed,—for Ella's bondage was a slavery as bitter and hard as ever that which bound a negro to his master, save only

with her there was not the hope but the blessed certainty of freedom at a future day,—then the monotony of her severe and crushing labors was broken in upon by what, though her mistress meant it should be an added chain, was indeed the first broken link her strained eyes had discovered. Until then, Mrs. Brown had been accustomed to sit up herself, when her daughters were absent nights at balls and parties; but at this time she decided to do so no longer, but commit that duty to Ella. Many and reïterated were the charges she received to keep the fire bright, and the lamp well trimmed, and the supper warm, and not to close an eye till the young ladies had not only returned, but held their long chat together, and nestled at length in their downy beds.

To most girls of the bound one's age, it would have been a tedious duty, and few could have been the faithful sentinel. But it opened to her a new and charmed existence. She had seemed to her dead friend to have inherited a passion for reading; and while in the asylum this had been ministered to, as far as was proper for one so young. But since she had lived in her present home, she had, save on the Sabbath, been debarred the privilege of reading. Her Bible, the precious parting gift of Mrs. Mann, and her few school-books, were all she had even then to satisfy her cravings. But the latter were studied till she was more perfect in the elementary branches of an English education than many who are popular instructors; while the former seemed to become, as it

were, a part of her very soul, so often did she peruse it, so closely home did she press its beautiful truths. Beside these, she had read no other books for four long years. She did, indeed, improve every opportunity to scan the fragments of newspapers which found their way to the kitchen; but they were too torn, too few, to satisfy the yearnings of her mind.

But in the chambers of those giddy girls, while they frolicked away the midnight hours, she drank in rich and copious draughts from the so long hidden springs of knowledge. The daughters of Mrs. Brown prided themselves on their literary taste; and though, like the majority of fashionable belles, that taste was one which the lighter magazine and the popular novel gratifies most acceptably, yet, to appear as they wished to in the circle in which their wealth and beauty more than their individual worth allowed them to mingle, they scattered upon their tables the costly editions of the true and earnest poets, not only of their own but of earlier days, and interspersed them with here and there a volume that was heavy with erudition. All and everything she found was eagerly perused by the young waiting-maid. But, with a discrimination rare in a mind so youthful, or rather, perhaps, because that mind had been for so long a time confined to pure and healthy studies that light and frivolous subjects could not satisfy it, Ella, though she hurried over romance, yet did not pause to ponder on it, but laid away in her heart the truths she found embodied in the few ponderous tomes, and

hushed herself to sleep, when the long vigil was over, with the holy songs of the lofty bards and true-souled minstrels.

From that time she lived a double life. Her outer, visible one, was so dusty with weary travel, that you would have pitied her; her inner, hidden one, so pure with ripples from heavenly clouds, that you would have envied her. The beauty of her nights of bondage, from that time, made not only endurable, but hopeful, its long and laborious days. But at length they all were ended, and she was free to seek where she should choose another home. And so, with her patient hope not smothered, but quickened with new life, she left the attic where so often she had wept, and which, now that she came to leave it, was yet holy with its memories; left the kitchen, in whose twilight shadows she had spent such strength; left, too, a tear upon its sanded floor,—for the old cook, who had almost cursed her when first she came there, blessed her when she said good-by; left the family to whom she had ministered so faithfully for eight long years, and took, as she left, sunbeam and music from them,—for, after she was gone, though neither of the parents or the proud maidens would own that she was dear to them, they were conscious of a loss that it would be difficult indeed to remedy. "If Ella were only here," and "Ella never did so," were frequent cries with them, as in her stead there came the green emigrant girl. And then, though she never knew it, that patient hope

which had lain eight years in her bosom was fulfilled, for they felt that they had, unknown to themselves, loved the little bound girl. But she was never the happier for that love; she never knew it, and, if she had, it would have come all too late; she wanted it while under their roof, not when she had left it. Nor, indeed, had she known it, would it have satisfied her now. It would have been like the love that is given to a flower, transient as the beauty of the petal, love given for fragrance lent; and she wanted now such love as we give the stars of heaven, love which has worship blended with it, love which once born can never die, because the idol about and around which are enwreathed the ties will ever palpitate with life.

For many weeks, ere the term of bondage was closed, Ella had scrutinized closely each daily paper that came in her way, in the wish that among the advertisements might be found one which would open to her patient hope its long-delayed fulfilment. But until the morn of freedom dawned her search was unsuccessful. But then a glad smile broke over her anxious face, as she read that a lady, advanced in life and confined by infirmities closely to her house, was desirous of securing the services of a young, agreeable, intelligent, moral young woman, of refined tastes and domestic habits, not as a servant, but a companion. To one with the requisite qualifications, the comforts and enjoyments of a luxurious home would

be tendered, and, in addition, a liberal compensation for time given and duties performed.

Ella was not vain, but she had an inward consciousness of the fact that she was such a person as was desired, and resolved to make an effort to secure the situation. That patient hope, the hope of being loved, led her on more than did the golden fee that was promised the successful maiden. She thought of the motherly love which had blessed her early days, and she thought she would be content if, by ministering assiduously to the aged lady who had advertised, she would but take her to her bosom as a dear and well-loved child.

It was a palatial home to which she was directed; and she trembled as she ascended the marble steps, and touched the silver bell. Would one nurtured in wealth like that look kindly on her, who had just emerged from bondage? But she thrust bravery into her soul, and, with a grace that would have honored an heiress, she advanced into the lady's presence. But the hope which had drawn her there grew faint as she looked into the sharp gray eyes that were bent upon her with such searching glances; and she trusted she should be dismissed, as had been a score of others, with the brief sentence, "You do not suit."

Long and closely did the lady question her, sometimes a cold smile wreathing her thin lips, like a gray moonbeam rippling over tombs, while again frowns would add wrinkles to her brow. At length,

when the young creature was almost worn out with suspense, she seized a volume that lay by her side, and told her to read a pencilled passage. Ella glanced at it earnestly. It was from one of her own favorite poets; she knew every word by heart,—ay, and her soul had been hushed to peace many a time by the spiritual melody that gushed forth in every line of the song. She did not read, though her eyes followed the words, but she recited it, as often she had done to herself, when none but the stars were witnesses, with that impassioned earnestness which, coming from the heart, goes again to it, thrilling even the sheathed nerve.

"You will answer," said the lady, when she had closed the book. "For years I have sought for one that had a soul—sought till I began to think the search was vain." And then she mentioned her terms, and told of the required duties. To Ella the latter seemed light as is a feather to a stone, compared with her previous ones; while the compensation seemed to her like a mine. And yet she turned away with a heavy heart; for that instinctive perception of her childhood lingered with her, and she felt that there her hope would only be taught an added patience. As she descended the staircase, she thought once she would turn back and break the covenant just made; but, on a landing, a door that had been closed when she ascended was thrown wide open, and she had a glimpse of book-shelves heavy with more volumes than she had ever dreamed of, and that

vision stayed her half-formed resolution. With a treasure like that at her command, she could endure to carry a while longer on her heart the patient hope that had nestled there like a thing of life for so many years.

To the careless eye, Ella, in again changing her home, would have seemed to have gone from a pallet of straw to a bed of roses. But the close observer would have said, what she soon found was a crushing truth, that the roses were of the thorniest kind. True, she had no longer any menial duties to perform; the servants were at her command almost as much as at that of her mistress,—ay, more, for they served the young from love, while they did the aged only from fear of losing their heavy wages. Neither had she to grope in gloomy kitchens through the day, or hush her moans in close attics through the night; her private rooms were luxurious, and, when not devoted to her duties, she had the range of the whole spacious house. She was no longer clad in patched, made-over garments, but rustled in rich silks, while her soft, silky tresses, which Mrs. Brown, from jealousy, had obliged her to keep bound up in ungainly braids, were allowed now to float like beautiful shadows over her snowy neck.

Her outward life was, indeed, changed for the better, but her inner was still a cloudy one. Her present mistress was one of those purely selfish women who seem to think it is the bounden duty of all who surround them to make life an Eden to

them, while they make it a hell to others. But for the severe discipline of Ella's youth, she could never have borne from a stranger what she did for three long years. The friends of the lady marvelled much at her patience; for never before had one of the many companions she had taken tarried with her a single month. She was not all bad, either; she was lavish of her money; but, then, she could afford to be, because she was so aged she could never hope to spend it all; she was finely educated, with refined and intellectual tastes,— but she never strove to benefit others by her mental endowments or acquirements, but only obliged them to minister to her in those respects. She was, in truth, a *negative being;* and, of all God's humanity, those are the most difficult to please,— while to love them, if it be not quite an impossibility, is so near one, that the difference is but that of a hair-breadth.

Ella, all swathed in patience as she was, could never have borne with her humors for any length of time,— that is, her physical health would have been undermined by the tests to which her spiritual organization was subjected,— had not the bodily infirmities of the aged woman obliged her to spend many hours in sleep. She retired early and rose late; and thus much precious time was at the command of her companion. With selfish motives, which Providence overruled for good, she allowed, nay, rather, commanded Ella to spend some of that time in improving her native talents. Her rich voice, trained

by an eminent vocalist, became yet richer, and thus ministered to the love of song which was almost a passion with the mistress. Her hands, taught to touch the keys of the piano with grace and correctness, also served to wile away the *ennui* that burdened the lady with a nightmare grasp. And she was willing and glad that she should devote much of her spare time to reading, because she could thus better enjoy her conversational talent.

The three years passed with Mrs. Martyn, though they shrunk the heart of the orphan, or, rather, compressed its affections, so that they led but a suffocating life, yet, stern as was their discipline, expanded her mind, and developed a wealth of mental gifts which surprised herself. But with the passing bell of the third year was tolled the knell of a human life. The aged woman to whom she had been so faithful passed suddenly away — so suddenly that she could not tell the maiden who had cheered and made so beautiful her latest years, that away down in her heart, amidst the stones and moss which had lain heavy and tangled upon it, there had rippled once more the stream of human love, and that the hired companion had been dearer to her than any she had known, but the babe that slept one night on her bosom and was then transformed to an angel. And thus again had the patient hope been fulfilled, and yet the patient expectant was none the happier. Indeed, all too late again would it have come; she wanted it not from dying, but living lips, and again

given as love is to the flower, it would not now have satisfied her soul — that soul that had yearned, from the years of childhood, to be loved as we love a star, because then the passion would be one that was immortal.

Again was Ella thrown upon the wide world. But very different now was her situation from that of the penniless girl who had left, three years before, the house of Mrs. Brown. The munificence of her dead mistress had allowed her to invest nearly all the liberal wages which had been tendered her, and she was not now obliged to search anxiously the papers for a new home, fearing that ere she found it she might need the cold charity of strangers.

She determined, ere she again sought for a situation, ere she again strove for the fulfilment of that patient hope she had now cherished eleven long years, to spend a few months in assiduous study, to perfect herself in those accomplishments and those educational branches in which she felt herself yet deficient. A few weeks after this resolution had been in active progress, as she carelessly run her eye, more from habit than thought, over the advertisements of the morning paper, her glance rested on one, that drove the color from her cheeks, and hushed the throb of her heart. It was long ere she awakened from the unconscious fit; and many hours elapsed ere she could again hold the paper. Well might her sensitive nature be thrilled; that hope

which she had nursed in silent tenderness from the hour her mother-friend had whispered to her the sad story of her infancy seemed now on the point of a blessed fulfilment. The notice which had arrested her was to this purport: that "If Ella LaGrange, whose mother fled from her husband's home in a southern city in the autumn of the year 18—, and was found dead in the streets of A—— in October of the same year, was yet living, she might hear of something to her advantage, by addressing, immediately, —— ——."

That night was passed by Ella in holy communion with her God. The next day bore a letter from her trembling hand to the individual mentioned, and then began weary hours of torturing suspense. About three weeks after, ere she had received any answer to her epistle, she was summoned to the parlor, to meet a stranger. Her heart throbbed with strange, wild pulsations; it might be him, that father whom she had so yearned to know. Years of habitual self-control alone enabled her to descend with apparent calmness. The first glance told her she was mistaken; those were not the features of the miniature. But it was the gentleman to whom she had written; and now was solved the mystery that had shrouded so long her birth. But better for the joy of her heart had it been still a mystery; for, though the story was delicately told, she could not but feel, from the stranger's narrative, that the father to know whom had been such a patient hope was a

parent only by the tie of birth; and she felt that, had she known him, though she might have been a *dutiful* daughter, she could never have been a *loving* one; she felt that he who had crushed her mother's young, sweet heart, who had torn from her the brightness and the beauty of life, could never have given her that love which she had so long, so sobbingly craved.

The story, briefly told, ran thus. Her father, many years older than her mother, had wooed her merely to gain possession of her wealth. He was a bad man, with passions that were a curse to him, and to all with whom he mingled. But, with a fine figure, a face that could put on a manly look, eyes that could beam in tenderness, lips that could whisper love-tones, with a mind that was finely cultivated, and well stored with learning's treasures, with a tact that could hide, when it would, the devil that lived in him, and robe it in such angelic garb that it seemed not deception, but reality,—it was not strange he should win the heart of a young and inexperienced maiden. Until her wealth was entirely in his possession, he kept the evil that was within him hidden; but then he disrobed it, and allowed it to howl around and trample upon the young wife's heart, without a single fetter.

She bore it four tedious years; but then, driven to desperation, fled with her babe,—fled, she knew not, cared not where, so she escaped the thraldom of her husband. He, with a villany that had more of hell

than humanity about it, forged a reason for her flight that obviated in him all necessity of pursuit. He did, indeed, in secret, trace her; but, when he learned that she was dead, and had left no clue by which her true tale could be gathered, he gave himself up to his wicked lusts, and lived the awful yet sad life of crime.

But, after many years, conscience awoke, lashed him with its lightning-rods, and thundered in his ear its terrible denunciations. On a lone, sick bed, he was forced to bear, to hear, and then, after many a struggle, to die as he had lived. Nature gave way; and he sought, as too many have before and since, by a dying act to expiate a life of sin. He bequeathed the remnant of his fortune, which, though small in comparison to what it was when given up so freely by his wife, was yet a munificent one, to the daughter she had left, if she could be identified; if not, to several charitable institutions, where his name would be lauded, instead of damned. And then came death and the grave — but no mourner to weep above it.

The articles found upon Ella's mother, and of which her father had retained a description, fully identified her; and, on a close examination of the exquisite workmanship of the locket, a jeweller discovered a secret spring, and thus revealed to her the certificate of her parents' marriage.

Golden news has an electric flight. It was not long ere Ella's story was as household words in the

city where she had lived so long unknown, unnoticed; and now it seemed that the patient hope might be fulfilled, for love-tokens greeted her from every hand, and hearts were bowed before her, as devotees kneel before a shrine. But it was too late, again; she wanted no homage to her wealth, but the love which could halo poverty with heavenly light; her soul, not her money, must be loved. Money, like the flower, is evanescent; but like the star she had longed to be in her childhood was her soul.

With her patient hope faint, yet beautiful still, Ella turned from the city, and resolved to seek a home with nature,—a home where she could love, if not be loved, because all around her should be the works of God. Three long-cherished wishes of her heart were obeyed before she left. Upon the low grave of her broken-hearted mother, who for a score and more of years had "slept unnoted," there rose a marble shaft, chaste in design and perfect in execution; upon it this inscription, only, "My mother." Upon that wherein slumbered the dust of her earliest friend, the gentle, Christ-like matron of the Orphan Home, there rose a like one, with the words, "My friend." The dead remembered, cared for, she gave, then, a munificent bestowment to that place which had guarded her early years, which was a home to the homeless. And then, with the whispers of angels in her ear, the blessings of

little children on her head, she sought, far away, from din and dust, a holy spot.

Long was that search, but it was a patient one; and what she sought so earnestly at length was found. The stage-coach left her, one summer's evening, in a little green valley, that seemed to nestle as lovingly in the shelter of the old gray hills that encircled it, as does a wee, laughing child in the arms of its grandsire. Bathed in the splendor of sunset, musical with the vespers of bird and brook, fragrant with the blossoms of June, that little nook seemed, to the weary girl, like a patch of beauty dropped from heaven. She resolved here to rest herself a while, if she did not find a home. But a few days' sojourn determined her to tarry as a resident; and she rented a small, brown, mossy cottage, half buried in vines, sheltered by olden trees, that for years had changed the wind to music, with a grassy plat in front, a tangled garden at the right, a green meadow at the left, and an old orchard in the rear, through which rippled a little silvery stream, that sang ever the same sweet tone, whether in its pure waters there was reflected sunbeam or shadow.

In this humble, but beautiful spot, Ella developed a plan which had for some time lived like a phantom in her thoughts. She opened one of her little rooms as a village school, and sought in the love of young and innocent children a fulfilment of her patient hope. It was easy for one so pure in heart as she to

win the confidence of the simple-minded villagers. True, at first there was some curiosity to know her former story, for it seemed strange that one so young should come alone to their little village, and settle. But, as Ella Albert, an orphan, with nothing to direct her save the wish to be happy, good and useful, they soon learned to cherish her as men do a waif from Eden.

Ella, in her new home, with her little friends about her part of the time, and her leisure hours divided between haunting nature and her favorite studies, was happier than ever she had been before. But her joy was not yet perfect. She was beloved fondly and truly, but she was not to the dear ones who encircled her now the one star of their heaven; she was not *the* love, but *a* love. There were yearnings they did not satisfy; there were cravings to which they could not minister; there were depths in her soul which they could not fathom, hopes that would not kindle for them, joys that would not bud, affections that would not burn.

There was still a sob in her heart; not an impatient, choking one, but that sad, holy one which is the blended tone of joy and sorrow; such an one as struggles in our bosoms when we pause by the green grave of one against whose now dusty heart we were wont to nestle, when we thank God for the dear ones left, and weep for the dear one gone.

Two years glided swiftly on, and Ella counted her twenty-fifth birthday. It dawned a bright and beau-

tiful morning, and her heart leaped up as the sunshine streamed so gladly into her chamber window, for she had promised her little ones a holiday in the woods. Long ere the appointed hour, they came bounding into her arms, lavishing upon her their tiny gifts of berries, fruits and flowers. And, once out in that dim old forest, never had children a more joyous time. Their smiles rivalled the sunbeams, and their voices the notes of the wild bird. And Ella seemed not then so much the teacher as the elder sister, or rather the angel sister, now playing "hide-and-seek" behind the mossy trunks, now laving their hot brows in the limpid spring, now twining wild-flowers in their braids and curls, now singing them old songs, and then weaving out of her own pure fancy impromptu tales; and finally gathering them in a circle, and joining her own voice with theirs in a chorus so sweet that the half-sung note died in the throat of the bird overhead, and then clasping with theirs her hands in prayer to the all-good Father, and, when the food was blessed, filling their laps with healthful dainties.

Towards the close of the afternoon, she led them by a winding way out of the wood to where branched off the highway; and there, to complete their pleasures, was an old farm-wagon, sufficient in size to carry them all, and leave them gleeful and hardly wearied in the arms of waiting friends. Ella declined riding herself; the evening promised to be beautiful, and she preferred a lovely walk through

the leafy aisles. Slowly she wandered on her homeward way, loitering longer than she was aware in communion with the little wild-flowers that seemed to nod acquaintance, and with the streamlet that seemed singing only for her to hear. She did not observe the growing darkness, or, rather, thought it but the clouds of twilight; but a brilliant flash, and a sudden wild and heavy thunder-boom, roused her from her blessed abstraction, and she hastened her steps, and, as thick, large rain-drops came pelting through the leaves, she started on a frightened race.

She had emerged from the forest, and turned into the little lane that led to the main road, when suddenly a streak more vivid than any that had preceded it touched the lifted branch of an aged tree, and flew like a golden chain unlinked from leaf to earth, shivering and splintering its hale, green life. Untouched herself, yet the fearful light, and the long, loud roll, were too keen a fright; and she sank in the wet grass, pale and passionless. Ere the trance was quite fastened upon her, she was conscious of a sudden hurried motion; but it lingered, in her half-dreamy state, as the rush of falling water, bearing her on its tide.

When again her heart beat truly, and the veil was taken from her sight, she found herself in a strange yet pleasant spot. A little hearthstone, brilliant with ingle-lights, first caught her vision; then she turned and saw herself upon a downy couch, with coverings snowy enough for death; but, ere she could

look longer, she met the anxious gaze of an aged lady, and was soon pressing her thin hands, and asking numberless, but almost inaudible questions.

"Be quiet and sleep to-night," said the watcher, in a voice so soft and sweet that it seemed to Ella like the angel-whispers of her early friend. She knew well the countenance that was bent over her so tenderly, though they had never before met as friends; and, worn and faint, like a sick child when it knows its mother is beside it, Ella turned again and slept. Sweet dreams came to her, such as she had seen before in waking hours, the embodiment of wishes, but such as till then had never made beautiful the holy watches of the night. She knew not that in the room above her there was a sleepless vigil held by a human heart, and that the mercy-seat was laden with prayers for her. She knew not that like a star she had dawned in the horizon of another's heaven. It was well these things were secret; she would not have slept so soundly had they been revealed.

She awoke with the birds, somewhat weak, yet otherwise in usual health. She lay for some time waiting to hear sounds of life; but, as the sunbeams crept faster and further into the room, she arose, and, finding her own clothes well dried upon a rack beside her bed, she dressed, and, after hesitating a while, pushed the door open with a noiseless motion, paced a narrow hall, entered another room, and then stood spell-bound. A door leading into a side room was

half opened, and through the space came the full, rich tones of a manly voice, as it read with holy earnestness that glorious, soul-touching chapter of St. John, where he writes, "Let not your heart be troubled." There was a gentle motion, and with it involuntarily Ella bent her knee, and, ere she had time to think, was communing, through the stranger's voice, with her heavenly Father. Then there floated to her the music of one of those grand old hymns which for years have filled with beautiful echoes the aisles of the sanctuary. With the last note Ella turned away, and as silently regained her room, pressing to her heart a new, ecstatic memory.

In a few moments that same gentle, aged lady sought her, and like a mother's were her kiss and her eager inquiries; and then she revealed to Ella the cause of her being in another's home. Her grandson, she said, had been returning from an afternoon ramble in the woods, and had just entered the lane by another path, when the lightning shivered the tree. He had a glimpse of the maiden, saw her fall, and, hastening to her, took her up as dead, and bore her to his home.

"If you do not sicken from the fright and wet," said the lady, with a pleasant smile, as she finished the brief tale, "I shall regard it as a happy accident; for I have long desired to know that girlish teacher, that darling Ella, of whom our village is so proud."

"I shall call it a happy one, though my nerves do quiver a while, and though I should have, what I do

not fear, a terrible cold," said the gentle girl; "for I have long, yes, ever since I came here, desired to be beloved by that aged Christian whom, come storm or shine, has been so faithful at the altar."

And their hearts were opened, and the strangers became as olden friends. Mrs. Stanley had seen many and sad reverses. She had buried an idolized husband, and six as idolized children; and had no blood tie now to attach her to earth, but that which bound her to her grandson. She had seen her wealth take wings, until, at last, with the little that remained, she had, like Ella, sought a home in this beautiful village, and had striven by strict economy to save yet enough to defray the collegiate and professional expenses of her only treasure. The former she had succeeded in doing; but, just as he had entered on a theological term, she received the blighting news that her little investment was lost. "He came home only night before last," said she, weeping, "and now insists upon giving up his professional studies until he can earn means to defray them. He bears the disappointment bravely — more so than I. From the hour his dying mother placed him in my arms, a little, helpless babe, I, in my heart, devoted him to the ministry; and so trained his childish and youthful thoughts that it became to him, as to me, the guiding wish.

"I have not long to live," said she, with touching cadence, "and I have only asked to see him in the pulpit, to hear him pray there once, and to listen to one

sermon from his lips; but, if he has me to work for, and everything to earn, the time will be *too long.*"

And then Ella turned monitor, and spoke to the aged woman as though their years had been reversed, and begged of her to cherish still and ever a patient hope, and said that God, who had blessed her so far, would bless her yet again. And then Mrs. Stanley clasped the dear girl to her bosom, and from that time they were to each other as child and mother.

"Ella, Ella! but one word more, and, as it is spoken, so shall we part — with smiles or tears. From the hour I clasped you, a half-dead creature, to my heart, that heart has beat for you alone. I have loved you as I would love a star, not with a mortal, but an immortal passion — not as humanity, but divinity. But, while so poor that I could see no way to become what I knew your beloved ought to be, I hid my treasured thoughts, my kindled hopes, my begging ties. But now, now that, by some mystery, I have the means to fulfil my cherished, glorious mission,— now I must speak. I cannot go till I know whether I may hope." They were whispered words, and like passionate breathings they touched the soul of the maiden that listened.

There came a murmur from her lips,— such a low, sweet, angelic tone, as steals through the crimson leaves of a flower when the soft south wind sings through the sunbeams that quiver above it,— but the lover could hear it plainly, and his heart grew strong

and pulsated with a new and holy life, for the whisper that stole from those lips spake thus: "Cherish now and ever a patient hope."

The little sanctuary which the inhabitants of Ella's new and beauteous village home had consecrated to the worship of the All-Father was crowded, one bright and sunny morn, to listen to the voice of a young herald of the cross,— to one whom the gray-haired pastor, who had spoken to them till his lips were tried with age, had selected as his successor,— even to the grandson of old Mrs. Stanley, to the betrothed of Ella Albert. There was a breathless hush, as his clear, melodious tones throbbed on the golden air; but ere the benediction had fallen from his lips there had been many a sob, and, as he descended from the pulpit, many a warm hand grasped his own, and many a voice whispered a blessing, and all felt that his lips had been touched, as it were, with fire from heaven. But he kindly though quickly turned from them all, seeking the wrinkled hand of her who had loved him from his birth, and who laid it now in benediction upon his head, and then turning to the soft, white palm of her through whose mysterious medium his study-life had been perfected, and through whose love he had seen life open with new blessings.

At sunset that little church was crowded again, not to listen to the eloquent voice of him who had charmed them in the morning, but to see solemnized

the holy rite that made him a husband, and changed their village idol, even the gentle Ella, from the maiden to the wife. With a group of loving children clustered around them, they stood before the altar. As the last solemn word dropped from the trembling tongue of the aged pastor, those little voices joined with one accord in a sweet bridal-hymn, and then, strewing Ella's path with flowers, they turned aside, and sadly watched her, as, leaning on the arm of her beloved, she passed out of their sight, and across the threshold of her wedded home.

That hour, that holy, sunset, Sabbath hour, fulfilled *the patient hope.* As she had longed in her childhood, so had she become,— not a star of heaven, but the star of a soul, loved and loving with a deathless passion.

THE ONLY DAUGHTER.

I.

A glorious child, dreaming alone,
In silk-soft folds upon yielding down.

"My cup is full; another drop and it would overflow!" whispered Laurent Sumner, in the most lover-like of tones, to his young and lovely wife, as he bent over her sick couch, and pressed his lips again and again to her pale cheeks. Never had she seemed so beautiful, never had his heart clung to her with such fervent love, nor ever had his life known such ecstasy of bliss. One little year of wedded life had glided swiftly and sweetly on, and now the anniversary of their bridal eve was hallowed by a gift from God, a gift of which Eden never boasted.

"My babe, my babe!" would murmur the young mother, as she felt upon her breast its gentle breathings; and, though all worn and wearied with her holy travail, her heart pulsated with a joy so pure, that heaven seemed near. "My wife, my child," from her husband's lips, came to her ear like an angel-song; and "*father*, *mother*," words only half

breathed to each other, in the first delirious kiss, to both seemed but the prelude of a life-experience that should be blissful as ever fancy pictured.

And the child,— the little daughter, whose birth-hymn had been so sweet to those anxious ears,— what or who seemed she like? A lily-bell, which a May frost would wither; or a rose-bud, which a June shower might beat from its stem. Each parent strove to trace in her baby features the other's looks; and, when the playful quarrel was likely to run too high, the young mother would exclaim, "Her eyes *are* just like yours, Laurent; you can't deny it, for they are dark, while mine are blue." "And I'll not deny it," would be the half-serious, half-laughing answer, "if you'll only own her *lips* are like your own!"

Beautiful, indeed, was Lilian Sumner, as a babe, and more beautiful still in her childhood and girlhood. With a brow and neck of dazzling whiteness, around and about which there clustered a wealth of soft brown curls, eyes brilliant as moonlit fountains, cheeks like the heart of a wild rose, lips like its bud ere the dew has been drunk, a form like the sylph of the poets, she seemed one of those glorious children whom heaven hath but lent to the earth as a dream of bright angels.

And what seemed she to those parents, whose life-cup of bliss she had filled to the brim? A child whom it was their high and glorious task to mould into a true-hearted woman; a child to be so edu-

cated, physically, intellectually and morally, that she might go forth at the appointed time, and fulfil aright her holy mission upon earth? Ah, no! not such the feelings with which they clasped her to their hearts, trembling ever, lest she should be torn rudely thence. She was to them but as an idol; an idol for whom no sacrifice could be too costly, no labor too fatiguing, no munificence too lavish.

While a babe, the most elegantly-arranged nursery was hers, and such tender care, that the breath of heaven never fanned her cheek save in a breeze too gentle to scatter the leaves of a full-blown rose. A cradle, fitter for waxen doll than human child, so soft and silken, was her resting-place when sleeping, and not for a moment dared the sentinel-nurse tire of her watch. When awake, like a beauteous image, sculptured only to be looked at, she was borne in her costly robes, now to the parlor, to be admired by wealthy friends, and now to the chamber of father and mother, and back again to nurse, her only exercise the putting forth her tiny hands and clapping them in baby glee. To be left awake in a roomy crib, to throw off the quilts, kick out the heels and toes of her silken socks against the footboard, or, clasping the rounds with her delicate fingers, grow strong in the effort to raise herself,— to be placed upon the floor, with only a guard of blankets, and suffered to twist, turn and frolic, toss away her toys, and then crawl slowly yet surely after them,—anon to forsake blanket and take a range of carpet, till by

and bye the table-leg or chair was reached, and then, after many unsuccessful efforts, to stand upright beside it, screaming in the wildness of a baby triumph, —not such the infant pastimes of the only daughter. All must be done for her by her idolizing parents and gold-paid nurse. When the little beggar-children, who lived but a block in the rear, born at the same time as Lilian, could paddle up and down the gutters of their villanous courts, she could but just, by careful guidance, take now and then a timid step.

In childhood and girlhood it was all the same. The delicate daughter of a delicate mother, instead of rearing her in that way which should best remedy her constitutional weaknesses, they were fastened upon her by a fashionable life. No gay sports in winter-time, upon the frozen stream, with the flying snow-ball; no being drawn by a beau-schoolmate on his Christmas sled, with now and then a sly and blushing ride behind him down the icy hill; no trundling of hoops in spring-time; no berrying frolics in summer; no nutting jaunts in autumn, to stimulate the heart to a beat less muffled, to invigorate the system with that strength so needed in life's later years. Such sports were quite too rude for one so delicate as Lilian. She might enjoy the breath and bloom and glory of the seasons in a gentle ride, wrapped in the rich cashmere or the costly fur, with a veil and shade to screen her from the sunbeams; she might promenade, in a splendid dress, the city

pavements, and, perhaps, clad in a showy kilt and trousers, mingle amidst the bathers of a fashionable beach. Other out-door exercise was not for her, the lovely and beloved child of wealthy parents.

Indoors, a play-house gorgeous enough for an Eastern princess was hers in her early years, and in later ones a boudoir which a queen might covet; and, indeed, all her youthful life was made to pass like a fairy dream. Masters for every study were liberally compensated, to perfect the discipline which a French governess had commenced; and the child became the maiden, to step into society with a "finished education," a classic grace, a brilliant beauty.

But what, in eighteen years of life, had she learned of woman's duties? She could sit by the couch of father and mother, when they were ill, and sing "fairy-like music" to them, press soft, sweet kisses on their pallid lips, weep over their agonies, and clasp their hands in fond affection; but she must call a servant to renew the poultice or adjust the bandage, and send to the confectioner's for those little dainties which the sick palate craves at the hand of love. She wrought exquisitely in paint, and wax, and crewel, and owned a work-box of mother-of-pearl, inlaid with gold; but no article of dress heavier than the embroidered collar or lace-edged handkerchief had ever wearied her delicate fingers. She was versed in female academic lore, and perfect in every fashionable accomplishment; but, with no single duty learned by heart, no better fitted for the real expe-

rience of womanhood, than is a new-born babe to strive to run.

But such the education idolizing parents gave their only daughter,— a daughter whom, should commerce but breathe a few rough blasts on her father's ships, would be left a beggared child; or, should death snatch her loved ones suddenly from earth, would remain more fit to sob her life away on their cold graves, than to put on woman's armor,— trust in God and confidence in self,— and go forth to battle humbly, but surely, with life's labors and its terrors. Tears, tears,— I crave them for the only daughter, more sinned against than sinning, left helpless by the love that should have made her helpful!

II.

Here, take this simple rose, and *feel*
The love my lips dare not reveal.

"'T is said that in gorgeous Eastern climes,
Where folks are too idle for stringing rhymes,
When a lover would send to his lady a token
Of love, which in words may not be spoken,
He hies away to the garden's bowers,
And culls a bouquet of the fairest flowers;
Which, woven together of magic art,
Are the language of love to the maiden's heart."

Thus gayly warbled Mrs. Sumner, in a voice almost as rich as her daughter's, as she entered the chamber of the latter, bearing a cluster of flowers,

in whose arrangement one but little versed in symbolism could yet read a message of love.

"Rouse thee, my dear one, and see what a beauteous gift some friend has sent to grace thy birthnight ball. Pity it is he did not send his name; he shall be dubbed knight of the nosegay. Canst guess, young dreamer, who the gallant is that has spoken his love in such flowery tongue? Rouse thee, and see!"

Idly, musingly lay Lilian on her silken couch, her flosses tangled on the floor, her half-read novel closed beside them. Not tedious, either, it would seem, was the lost time; for a rich color gleamed on her soft cheek, and her dark eyes were brilliant with happy thoughts. She raised herself uneasily as her mother closed her gay appeal; but there was magic in that gift she clasped so nervously. Richer grew the rose-blossom on her cheek, and more beautiful beamed the sunlight of her eye. In vain she strove to answer her mother's raillery. Her lips quivered in unuttered music, but her heart beat with such wild and passionate pulses, she could but hide her face in the tell-tale flowers, and wet them with such dew-drops as never graced them in their garden home.

Not long did the mother tease her idol. She had not quite forgotten an hour of bliss which her own heart, in its maiden life, had known; and, after pressing a few warm kisses on the blushing brow, she turned away, murmuring rather to herself than her daughter, "A coronet! I had not looked so high,

but thou wilt grace it, dear one, as well as it grace thee."

Happily for the daughter's day-dream, she heard not her mother's words. As with lightning would they have shivered the castle which thought had built in a moment of bliss; as with storm-waves, dashed out the colors which fancy had woven in the bow of the future. Left to the solitude her full soul craved, the hours passed by on golden pinions, and heaven seemed very near.

Ask ye if the maiden truly guessed the giver's name, and what quick perception was the seer? Love is instinctive in its recognitions. The clasp of the hand, the light of the eye, the tone of the voice, are electric revelations, betraying the lover where the world around sees but one of many friends. These had fair Lilian known, though never save in the sight of others had she seen or talked with him whose "token of love" lay near her heart. Betrothed ere yet their tongues had lisped their love, were two young creatures in that birth-day morn. Sayest thou it is a marvel? Thou hast not loved, then; else it would be plain as sunlight.

"Rather would I lie here and dream," said the happy maiden to her mother, as, towards the close of day, she entered with the costly robes that were to adorn the daughter in the gay hours so near at hand. "Here I can make the world go as I bid it; there I must go as it bids me."

"But here cannot come the knight whose token

has charmed thee, the livelong day, while there. Ah, I'll warrant his armor has been worn for hours, and each hour has seemed to him an age. Thou wilt be kind to him for his flowers' sake,—wilt not, fair daughter?—and come down from stars to gaslight and—"

"Spare me, spare me, mother, and I'll be the gayest of the gay; nay, dance all night, but grant me one boon alone."

"One! Yes, a thousand, dearest, so thou dost be again a mortal, and feed on more substantial food than the fragrance of those rose-leaves, that for hours have lain against thy lips. Speak, then."

"That I open the ball with the knight of the nosegay, mother;" and the voice, gay at the first word, was almost lost, ere the last, in maiden confusion.

"Open, and close, and dance when thou wilt with him, dearest; father and mother will see thee with joy;" but emotion too sacred for the lips of raillery checked short the words of the fond parent, and mother and child in each other's arms sobbed out the thoughts that could not be spoken. "I cannot lose thee, yet joy to give thee up," "I cannot leave thee, yet joy to go," was the language of those hearts,—of those hearts whose secrets neither had guessed aright, though both were sure there was no mystery now.

"My beauteous child," exclaimed the father, proudly, as he clasped upon her snowy arms and

neck his birth-night gifts. "You could scarcely be more bewitching, did the coronet rest on that brow;" and he gently drew her to a mirror, that she might see the fine effects of the costly gems.

"Better my head without than with a coronet, dear father," was the laughing answer. "It would surely break beneath it, there is so little in it."

"Heart might uphold the head, perhaps, my Lilian. What say you?"

"Not if a coronet were there, my father. That heart was filled with blood from the great one that beats in your own breast,—a very democratic heart, sir, and its red life would boil to madness, did an English one come near it;" and again her voice rang in clear, sweet laughter, and her father joined her, saying to himself, "A woman to the last;" and thus, without a thought of cheating, all were deceived, their own wish being the cunning knave.

"And that, I suppose, is the English lord, of whom I have heard so much," remarked a gentleman, who had but recently returned to his native city, after a lengthened absence, to the friend who had been pointing out to him the distinguished belles and beaux of the brilliant assemblage; "that splendid-looking fellow, who leads the dance with our fair hostess. A glorious couple, truly; old England will have to own our daughters are as beauteous as our sons are brave."

"Spare your rhapsodies, dear sir. That splendid-

looking fellow never yet looked on English soil. His bride, if ever he win a prize like that, will be forced to write upon her cards, instead of Lady D——, plain Mrs. Dr. Grant."

"Faith! and if I am any judge in such delicate matters, I should say she would be nothing loth to do so, the earliest day he asks. But who is he? Some rich man's son, I guess, whose diploma has been bought with his father's name and purse, and who can heal the sick as well as you or I,—unless, indeed, he be a seventh son, a doctor born, not made."

"Wrong, wrong again. Whose son he is, I know not; but this I do know, his diploma was not bought, but earned by noble talent and unwearied toil. He is one of those noble youth to whom Heaven gives genius and a bed of straw; I'll warrant he has not three red cents to jingle."

"But how happens it we see him on such terms with the heiress of Sumner's wealth?"

"Luck, partly, and partly our host's republican ideas about an aristocracy of mind, as well as birth and purse. His wife was thrown from her carriage, a few months since, and directly before the young doctor's door. Of course, he must rush out and bear her in; the first patient, too, I guess, that had yet darkened that office-door. A sprained ankle and sundry bruises called for professional skill; and, to cut the matter short, he has been intimate in the family ever since; and, since employed by Mrs. Sum-

ner, has grown fast into notice, and thus a lady's tumble has proved a very God-send to him. His debts are paid, and his thread-bare clothes exchanged for those you see; but still he is poor, and must be so for many a year to come."

"And will Sumner, think you, consent to a life-union of those hands which seem instinctively to find each other in the mazes of the dance?"

"I cannot say how far democracy will carry him, but I marked a shade upon his own and lady's brow when the dance opened, and the lord stood sullen in a corner. A coronet before a scalpel, I guess, would be their wish."

"But not the daughter's; and how is her will,—strong?"

"She is an *only daughter*, and they will find it hard to thwart her now, when for eighteen years her word has been their law. But come, leave gossip to the ladies, and let's off to Sumner's pictures."

Sullen, indeed, looked the English lord the while he stayed, and at an early hour he left, a deeper gloom upon his brow, and a blighted hope in his proud heart. And Lilian — seemed she to mind his looks or care for his departure? She was a little thoughtful for a while, and then half sad, but not because there was sorrow in her heart, but because no true soul can give another pangs without a pang itself.

Late in the evening, wearied with the adulation of the many, she stole from the brilliant and crowded

ball-room to a deserted parlor, and, throwing herself upon a sofa, leaned her head upon her hand in sweet meditation. But not quite unnoticed had been her flight. A little while, and a hand was softly laid upon her own, and a rich, manly voice whispered, "A rose-bud for your thoughts;" and, as she started, blushing and trembling as though the eye of the intruder had already seen them, their glances met, and *then* she felt that they *were* known; and as he, with timid yet graceful air, held towards her the moss-bud, she knew that the holy hour for their hearts' exchange was come.

Not long he held the bud; she took it — how, she never knew; but she did know that in the act their fingers were entangled, and though, even to herself, she never whispered it, she felt that then

> "He drew,
> With one long kiss, her whole soul through
> Her lips, as sunlight drinketh dew."

III.

> That cottage, half-embowered
> With modest jessamine, and that sweet spot
> Of garden ground, where, ranged in meet array,
> Grow countless sweets, — the wall-flower and the pink,
> And the thick thyme-bush.

"He is rich, he is handsome, he is noble, good, true-hearted,— I know it all,— but, mother, I do

not, cannot love him. It would break my heart to try."

"But wherefore, Lilian," asked the mother, gently. "He is what I have often heard you say should be your ideal lover; then why, if in this world of stern realities you have once found a man whom you can measure by your standard and find him true, why not give him your heart?"

The maiden did not speak, but the hot blood lashed with a crimson tide her bosom, cheeks and brow, and answered for her.

"It is, then, as I feared," said her questioner; "you love another, Lilian, and he—"

But the true woman spoke now from the daughter's lips, as she inquired, with passionate earnestness, "And why have you feared, mother? Did you think, have you thought that I would ever give my heart to one unworthy of it? You have misjudged me, if so you think, or so you have thought."

"Then your heart *is* gone, my darling," and tenderly was the child pressed to the mother's heart. And then she whispered, "Will you tell me who is now the fortunate possessor, or shall I guess?"

Words struggled for utterance on the maiden's lips, but emotion strangled them. And then the mother spake a name, and the daughter pressed her hand, and hid her blushing face yet closer on that heart, where for years it had been bliss to nestle.

There was a long, long silence. But, when both were calm again, the mother talked earnestly and

seriously with the young creature, whose life seemed to herself now like one of those sweet romances which poets so love to sing about. She spoke of the young physician's standing in society, of his poverty, of the years it would take him to accumulate a fortune; and then told how unfitted Lilian was to be his wife, so slender and so delicate, knowing naught of care or economy, unused to everything but luxurious ease. "It will never do, my daughter, for you to be a poor man's wife."

"Love and happiness in a hovel, mother, sooner than pride and misery in a castle," exclaimed the daughter, passionately; and then, grasping her mother's hand, she looked intently into her eyes, and asked, "Would not you, my mother, have married father, though he had been as poor as even —" her head dropped; she could not yet speak his name without a quiver of the lips.

"But you, Lilian," said the mother, "cannot endure the ills of poverty. It would be like casting your pet canary out of its gilded cage when a snowstorm was raging,— as soon tell that to live and be glad mid the falling flakes, as to try to make yourself what, as a wedded wife, you should be, with poverty for your portion."

"Mother," said the young girl,—and it was evident, from the forced, unnatural calmness of her voice, that a mighty passion was brewing in her heart,—"mother, you may refuse to let me wed him that I love, but I will wed no other; I will die

first;" but her sensitive nerves had borne all they could, and, white as the lily that lay on her bosom, she sunk on the couch, her eyes closed, her lips grew pallid, and her pulse still.

For hours they bent over her, her father and her mother, and many skilled attendants, fearing each moment would be the last. Terror and anxiety at length overcame the scruples of pride, and they sent for the young physician. One moment the agonized parents spoke alone together; then, meeting the young lover at the door, they whispered, "Save her and she is yours."

It was a priceless fee, and well and earnestly strove he to win it. It was long ere by any skill the palsied nerves could be made to thrill; but, the death-grasp once loosened, and there was needed no other medicine than the pressure of the physician's hand, the almost inarticulate syllables of his voice, and the soft, silent touch of his rich lips.

On her nineteenth birthday, Lilian Sumner stood before the marriage altar, and gave her hand forever to the young, the still poor, though now universally acknowledged talented and deserving young physician. There was a brilliant wedding-party, a costly journey, balls, soirees and calls, on their return; a few weeks' sojourn in the splendid home of the bride's father, and then wedded life began in earnest, in a beauteous cottage home.

It is not often love in a cottage, save where the

picture is an ideal one, fares so well as did that of this young couple. But, the wedding gift of a rich father, it could not well be other than one of luxury. It was, indeed, a cottage such as romance tells us of, where frescoed walls and draperied casements, rare pictures and costly vases, carpets from Eastern looms and mirrors worth a fortune, go to make up the items.

Life, wedded life, did indeed open brightly to the only daughter. Beloved by one of whom she might well be proud, located in the vicinity of her early home, nothing lacking in her luxurious rooms, no tedious household cares,—the mother, conscious of her daughter's unfitness for them, having given up her own well-trained domestics, and, moreover, coming in almost every day herself, to see that all went right,—it was no wonder that life seemed to Ella a foretaste of heavenly bliss. But one shadow darkened her path. Her husband could not always be with her. He was too true a man to neglect the interests of his patients even for the endearments of his young and lovely wife; and, day or night, come the call when it would, he was ever ready, ever willing, ever faithful.

Had Lilian been as true to their interests as was Edward, the after passages of life had perhaps been as bright and beautiful as those that marked its dawn. She was, indeed, true to them as far as early discipline had taught her; she ever met him with the kiss of love; she ever chose his favorite robes;

she wore her beautiful tresses as he desired her; she wiled away the hours of anxiety and fatigue, by singing him the songs he loved, and reading to him pencilled paragraphs from the authors with whom he best loved communion. As far as she knew her duty, she did it well and nobly. Not upon her, so much as upon the fondly-doting but misjudging parents, rested the fearful responsibility of her unfitness for life in its stern, practical details. She had been to them, in very truth,

"A messenger of peace and love; a resting-place for innocence on earth; a link between angels and men."

But she had not been regarded by them, as God had meant she should be,

"A talent of trust, a loan to be rendered back with interest."

IV.

Life is a strange avenue of various trees and flowers;
Lightsome at commencement, but darkening to its end in a distant, massy portal.
It beginneth as a little path, edged with the violet and primrose,
A little path of lawny grass, and soft to tiny feet:
Soon spring thistles in the way, those early griefs of school;
And vipers hide among the grass, and briers are woven in the hedges.

As had been the anniversary of her parents' bridal eve, so was that of Lilian's hallowed by a gift from God. But ere the young mother could be roused

from the death-like trance that followed so closely upon her hours of pain, the babe had hushed its piteous moans, and lay shrouded in a tiny coffin bed. She woke a mother, it was true, a holy mother, for her little one was already "in the kingdom," pure and spotless as though it had never lain beneath a human heart. But the shock was too much for one so delicate. Her naturally frail constitution, which the whole tendency of her life had been to make still frailer, could but ill endure the travail of human birth, and her sensitive heart seemed torn in twain with the sad tidings of her child's departure. The double agony was too much, and she sank under it, — sank till it was only by pressing a mirror to her lips that they could tell the life-blood yet quivered in some distant vein.

For weeks she lay upon her couch, a pallid, death-like creature. And when, at length, she left it, she was so changed that her dearest friends, had they not been with her all the long sad time, would scarcely have guessed she was their darling. Though living, her hold on life was yet so slender, that it seemed a breath could sever it. All that wealth and affection could dictate was freely, gladly offered by the idolizing parents; and all that the severest midnight toil had ever taught him was now brought forward by her doting husband, to ease her pains and quicken the throb of life.

As summer brightened into golden autumn, and she became no better, still walked with that weary

tread, still offered that wasted hand, and smiled with cheeks and lips that were so snowy, he knew the rigorous northern winter would chill entirely her shivering life,— that nothing could save her, nothing could spare her till another spring, but a speedy removal to balmier airs and sunnier skies. He consulted the eminent and the learned of his profession, and they all coincided with him. It was decided she must sail either for Italy or the south of France.

But who should be her attendants? Her husband, of course, said she, and so said every one. And yet, if he went, the practice so fairly and honorably commenced would be smitten in its outset, and it would take many a long future year to reach his circuit. But he must go. And not he alone, but her parents likewise. She was their all; life had no joys were their daughter gone, and so, though there was even then a mercantile pressure hard to be borne, even by the wealthiest, the father, settling his affairs as best his hurry and anxiety would suffer him, determined to go with them; and long ere the Indian summer had touched the western world with beauty, the four were sailing on the deep. The father's purse of course defrayed the many and the heavy expenditures, not only of the voyage, but of the winter's sojourn. "It will all be yours when we are gone," said he, in reply to the noble words of the young husband, as, when first speaking of the change, he had said, "My wife cannot go, but your

daughter may; the father is rich, the husband poor." "It will all be yours; as well have a portion of it now as ever."

With the spring-time came new blossoms to Lilian's cheeks, and again the pulse beat with a healthy touch. But she was still delicate, and the fond father would not hear of their return until another season should have quite restored the slender life. Summer, autumn and winter, partly passed, and then there came an urgent summons to Mr. Sumner to return. There were dark hints thrown out of embezzlement and fraud by those he had trusted with his all; there were tales of fortunes wrecked, of fair names sullied, and, in brief, of a commercial crisis that might well stagger the proud heart of one whose earthly wealth was invested in ships and stock. He must sail immediately, and with that fact a cloud shadowed the pleasant villa, which had now been for months radiant with the joy of happy hearts; a wail resounded through those corridors, which but the week before were musical with song. Mrs. Sumner was torn by a conflict of duty. She knew it would be a fearful wrong to suffer her husband to go alone to meet the stern trials which awaited him on his native shore, and yet she dared not leave her child.

"You must go, mother," said the latter, forcing a hopeful smile; "you must go with father. Better to leave me here with Edward, than to know he is alone. If I should die, there will be one to care for

me; if he should, there will be none. Go, go; do say you will."

And so they went, father and mother, and left their darling in a foreign land,—parted on the shores of glorious Italy, to meet only on the shores of a more glorious clime.

With heroic strength Lilian sustained herself till they were gone. But, as the setting sun flung its last crimson beam upon the sails that bore them from her, she sunk into her husband's arms, the same white, inanimate, drooping creature as that over which he once bent in the wild anxiety of bewildered love. A night of agony succeeded, a morn of sorrow; for, though a second time the young wife had known the mother's pangs, there was yet no babe to nestle on her heart. A mate to the little grave that lay green and beautiful in her native home was now hollowed out in the earth of Italy, and there was an added angel at the Saviour's feet.

Again there succeeded a long and fearful illness, rendered more terrific this time by anxious thoughts about her beloved, her absent parents. Months sped on ere they heard from them, and then, just as the pale invalid was quiet, in the early days of convalescence, there came a letter with a boding seal. The almost illegible lines had been penned by the trembling hand of the worn-out mother, on the first sad, desolate eve of unexpected widowhood. A long, tedious, stormy voyage, combined with restless desires to know of the welfare of the dear one left behind,

and of the state in which he might hope to find his affairs at home, had but ill-prepared the mind of the merchant for the disastrous intelligence that greeted him almost as soon as he walked the plank that led from the ship to shore. He was a ruined man; and, but for the jewels he had clasped upon his wife in sunnier days, he must have asked of charity for a death-bed pillow, and for a grave to rest in when his weary weeks of woe were passed.

"There does not remain to me," wrote the anguished survivor, "sufficient funds to carry me to you. All that is left us is that cottage home where you spent one happy year. Thank Heaven, that was not sold, as you had once determined. The profits of your furniture, which we all thought were so safely invested in your father's business, are all gone. Perhaps, if you, Edward, were on the spot, you might yet reserve something; but, as for me, I can do nothing. All I pray is that I may come to you.

"A few sterling friends yet gather around me, but all whom we knew and loved the best have suffered keenly; and, though they promise together to defray my expenses to you, I dare not be too certain of their doing so."

In a postscript she added, "I shall sail next week," and named the vessel.

Of course such mournful tidings brought again the sick wife to the lowest stage of illness, and, but for the hope of her mother's speedy arrival, they would

scarcely have dared look for life. Long and tedious seemed the expectant weeks, and when the vessel at length hove in view, anchored and sent to the villa, not the mother, but another letter, draped in sable, the young husband resigned all hope of his beloved; a grave beside her little one, under the blue sky of that sunny clime, was all the picture that fancy dare offer to his vision.

But God had yet a holy mission for that pale, sad creature who lay upon her couch, now so white and still that she seemed but a shrouded form, and again wringing her thin hands and moaning with such touching cadence that the attendants thought it would be but mercy in Heaven to still the unquiet nerves with the opiate of death.

"Live for me, Lilian!" whispered her husband, one night, as, pressing her to his bosom, she told him she heard the passing bell. "Live for me; they have gone, but gone together; if you go, I shall be all alone."

Then, for the first time, she prayed for life; she hushed her holy but selfish sorrow, and resolved to put on the strength of the true soul, and, as the daughter and mother of angels, be content yet to be herself a mortal. High and heavenly thoughts were engendered in her mind that night. For the first time she looked upon life as it is, and realized how unfitted she was, and had ever been, for its real duties. Instead of nursing grief, she resolved now to make that a discipline subservient to noble ends.

She resolved to be, what yet she never had been, a true helpmate to her husband,— a wife in the purest sense of that significant name.

It was wonderful what an effect her mental and spiritual resolutions had upon her physical health. Ere a few weeks elapsed, she was able to bear the voyage home; indeed, it was necessary, if they went at all, they should go quickly, for the means left them by the deceased father when he sailed were almost spent. There was ample time for thought to perfect its blessed work in the heart of the young wife, during the long voyage. Her whole life was reviewed by her with the rigid scrutiny of a soul awakened suddenly from stupor to glorious life. She saw that she had been sinned against by those who loved her best; that, if properly trained from her infant days, she might have done a world of good to others while counting the years of girlhood, and been fitted, instead of all unfitted, for the stern duties in which even the happiest marriage involves the wife. Children might now have lived in her bosom, but for her own deficiencies in physical strength; and but for those deficiencies they had never any of them left their native soil to seek health on a distant shore; but for them, she might have stood beside her dying parents, and been now the active partner of the gloomy days in prospect, instead of a frail, ghostly invalid.

But those who had sinned so fearfully against her had sinned in love, and long ago expiated it by the

agonies which had tortured them as they bent above her sick couch. The past could not be recalled; the present was all she could claim, for the future was shadowy with warnings. But she resolved that the present should be "wisely improved;" that health, in its broadest sense, should be assiduously courted; that duty should be her watch-word.

Richer far was Edward Grant, when he landed in his native city, than when he left it. Money was gone, but a jewel worth more than earth's deepest mine was his. He was now the husband, not of a petted child, but of a noble, self-sacrificing, true-hearted woman.

V.

> Till at the last she set herself to man,
> Like perfect music unto noble words.

"Mother, dear mother! will you sit up now, and take your tea?"

The voice was strangely rich, and modulated to the sweetest, softest of love's holy tones. The speaker was a fair young girl, of but twelve summers, delicately formed, and yet agile with the vigor of health; there was a sun-tint upon her small hands and beautiful brow, but you would forget the brown in the rich rose-flush that sparkled on her cheek. Indeed, she seemed the personification of vigorous girlhood, and yet an emblem of the angelic, as she entered with

such light, noiseless step the darkened room, disposed everything in its proper place, stirred silently the wasted fire, raised the curtains just enough to let the beauty, but not the brightness, of the sunset enter, and then stole to the bed, and, pressing the pale brow, and kissing the lean cheek, spoke the few words we have just written.

Then she laid her blooming face next to the mother's, and received the many and pure kisses which the one ever loved so well to give, and which were so precious for the other to receive. Then she brought the dressing-gown, and, robing the invalid in it, and drawing the shawl yet closer round her shoulders, led her carefully to the cushioned chair, fastened it back to the nicest pitch, rested the swollen feet upon the softest stool, and drew to her side the little stand, with its snowy napkin, its glistening silver and tintless china, and begged her mother to try and eat. Never did professional nurse lay the table of her patient with such delicious toast — not a burnt flake upon it, and seasoned so carefully as to tempt the daintiest palate; and the oysters were cooked only to a turn, the custard trembled with the proper strength, and the tea would neither scald or freeze.

"And now, mother," said the daughter, after watching her a moment, as she tasted the delicate viands, "while you are eating and resting, I will just run and give Eddie that snow-ball frolic I promised him. It would be too bad to disappoint him to-night again, he does so love one."

"Not much better, though, than Lilian," said the mother, with a roguish smile.

"Not much, mother, that 's true. O, it is such fun to romp out in the drifts! I can always work as good and as fast again, after a hard play with Eddie, out doors." And she danced out of the room, and, tying on her hood and scarf, and drawing on her mittens, she bounded out into the open, crispy field, where her little brother was striving to build a snow-house.

What a frolic they had there! how merrily flew the white balls! how clearly rang the joyous shouts! And when they had had enough of that, Eddie sprang on his sled, and declared to Lilian that she must be his pony, and give him one good ride. Never had little boy so beautiful a creature harnessed for him; like a young gazelle she sped away with him; and, when he lashed, as sometimes he did, a little too hard, she paid him off roundly by tossing with her gay steps the crusted flakes high into his face. Then they had a good long slide down the steep hill, the little sled landing them in a snow-drift, from which they emerged like white-plumed birds, with voices as wild and songs as sweet.

While their play was wildest, their glee most noisy, there passed by a splendid sleigh, containing two richly-dressed ladies, and two little girls about the age of Lilian. They were all wrapped up as though facing a Siberian winter, and shivering even

then. As they glided past the buoyant children, one of the little travellers observed to the other,

"Do only see, Mary, if there is n't Lilian Grant out snow-balling! I should think she would be ashamed to be seen playing such rude games."

"I should think she would freeze," said the other, drawing her veil yet closer over her face, and hugging her muff more tightly.

"She is the greatest romp in the town," said one of the mothers, contemptuously. "I would not for worlds have a girl of mine so rude."

"I have always wondered at Mrs. Grant's bringing up her children as she does, it is so different from the way she was trained. But she has some very peculiar views respecting education, I have been told."

"Well, for my part, I want my children brought up so that they will not disgrace me when they are old enough to go into society; but how do you suppose those will appear, when allowed to romp and race out doors, as they do for hours every day?"

The costly equipage sped on, and the children to whom its inmates took such an exception frolicked a while longer, and then bounded into the house, and, after warming themselves at the kitchen fire, stole, with steps like falling flakes, into the sick room. When there, Eddie nestled at his mother's feet, and recited to her a pretty hymn he had learned that day, while Lilian carefully removed the tea-things, carried them to the kitchen, washed and replaced them,

and then, laying the table in the dining-room for father and themselves, and directing the only domestic what dishes to prepare, returned to the room, and, drawing a chair beside the invalid, took her thin hand, and, after showering it with kisses, laid her cheek upon it, and then lulled the hours with such music strains as one might fancy would steal upon their ears when on the heavenward flight.

By and by there was the jingling of sleigh-bells —familiar bells they seemed; they listened one moment, and then were sure. Out bounded Eddie to take his father's satchel, while quickly did Lilian draw to the hearthstone the large, favorite chair, dispose a pair of slippers by the fire, and hang a dressing-gown to air. And after the chilled limbs were warmed, and the day's story had been told, how gracefully she waited upon the father and the little brother to their warm, nice supper; and not even her lady-like mother could have passed the tea more handsomely.

Ere she retired that night, she had seen Eddie snugly packed away in his trundle-bed; had unrobed her mother, and disposed the pillows and the coverings in the proper line; had dressed the lame hand of her father, ordered the breakfast, mended the week's stockings, read the evening paper to the weary physician, and the beautiful chapter where Christ heals the sick, and sung her last new hymn.

"What a blessing Lilian is to us!" exclaimed the father, as, though the door had closed on her, a snatch

of the sweet hymn she had just warbled to them came stealing softly down the staircase, and echoing through the hall.

"Indeed she is," responded the mother, warmly. "Never had patient so gentle and kind a nurse; never mother so trusty a daughter; or brother so dear a sister."

"And yet the neighbors all call her the greatest romp in town," said the father, archly.

"No disparagement to her, that," answered the mother, earnestly. "If I had only been allowed to frolic in the air, as she does, I should not now have been confined so long and often to the sick room — been an old woman ere yet I had seen the prime of life; no, nor"— speaking with mournful emphasis— "have had so many touching memories."

"And yet, but for those memories," said her husband, clasping gently the delicate fingers of his wife, "but for the sad experiences of our early wedded life, though we might have had another angel in the better land, our hearts and home would never have been gladdened by so bright, so beautiful, so perfect a specimen of girlhood, as is Lilian, though, like her mother,"— and he paused to shower her brow with kisses, then continued,— "though, like her, she is AN ONLY DAUGHTER."

THE MOTHER'S TEMPTATION;

OR,

THE DEVIL CAST OUT.

I.

It was a fearfully cold night. The earth, sparkling and bright in its crystal robe, lay asleep on the bosom of Frost. All radiant and beautiful with the flashing gems of the cloudless sky, night smiled serenely upon the jewelled sleeper, and held a noiseless, tireless vigil. Chill was the breath of the winter-spirit, and hoarse its voice, as, in dismal shrieks and plaintive moans, it echoed through the deserted streets. It was a time when the rich man, beside his blazing fire, *thought* of the woes of cheerless poverty, and shivered; a time when the poor one, crouching over his dying embers, *felt* them, and froze.

At the further end of a long, narrow lane, in the suburbs of A——, stood a low, wooden dwelling, black with age and rickety with decay. So rude was its exterior, that a pampered steed would have scorned its shelter, and no passer-by would have

dreamed that human life existed there, that human dust made it a holy spot. Yet so it was. Beneath that sunken roof a poor, lone widow and little, fatherless children found their only home. A dark, narrow hall, through which the solemn wind-music wandered at pleasure, extended the length of the building. Upon the one side a creaking ladder led to a miserable loft, while upon the other a door opened into the apartment which occupied the remainder of the ground-floor. And a wretched place for human life to exist in was that cold, dilapidated room. The walls, unplastered and full of crevices, were but a slight shield from the howling blast and the biting air, and dark and shadowy as the sides of a vault. The floor was but little better than the damp earth, so rotten and sunken were the time-worn boards, while the loose and shivering windows rattled with the death-notes of comfort. Scanty, too, were the necessaries of that bleak home, and of comforts it had not the shadow. A low trundle-bed, with a straw pallet, a plain deal table, and a single chair, constituted its visible furniture. In a little closet were concealed a few articles of cheap earthen-ware, a tin cup and pan, a knife and fork, and a single spoon. The feeble light reflected from the few coals scraped closely together upon the hearth-stone, blending with the pale moonbeams that stole in through the windows, served to reveal the inmates of that cheerless home.

Upon the table lay the snow-white figure of a child

some three or four years old. Its little death-cold form was concealed by but a single robe; for the mother, stricken with sorrow and poverty, had been forced to strip the dead, that the living might be warmed. With the setting sun had the patient little sufferer gone to rest; and, though tears flowed thick and fast down the mourner's face, as she took its pale, passionless form from her bosom, and with her own hands closed the blind eyes and bound up the speechless mouth, she murmured not, but felt that it was in mercy God had stilled its pain and hushed its cries. Upon the poor apology for a bed slumbered a pair of twins, beautiful girls, who had counted the blossoms of but seven summers. Their moanings, and tossings, and deeply-flushed cheeks, told that the feverish hand of sickness pinioned them there. The same fearful symptoms that were visible in the dead brother, the day before, had manifested themselves in their cases; and, as the watcher had drawn closer around them the scanty covering, she had moaned sadly, "It is useless to hope for them; a few hours more, and these, my first-born, will sleep with the loved ones gone before."

Upon the only chair, which was drawn as near as possible to the phantom of a fire, sat the mother, the widow. A little, sickly babe, purple with cold and lean with hunger, was pressed closely to her bosom, shielded as carefully as could be by her arms and rags from the piercing blasts that swept with merciless gusts through and around that apartment of

woe. Her form, once tall and graceful, was now bowed with anguish and stiff with frost. Her small, delicate hands, once soft and white, were now calloused and brown. Her countenance, in other days so brilliant with beauty, was now pallid and wan, and full of touching sorrow; her eyes, sunken and tired, were wet with the tides of grief; her high, fair brow was pencilled all over with the handwriting of sorrow; her finely-chiselled features were sharp from the pangs of want, and her thin lips and bloodless cheeks told a pitiful tale. Yet, amidst all the sadness which shadowed so fearfully her countenance, there gleamed, now and then, an expression that told of faith in God's promises. O, deep-seated and strong must be that religious confidence which, after all the tests and trials to which that lonely woman had been subjected, could yet whisper to her of heavenly trust. But the star of hope, though low indeed in her horizon, had not quite set; and, so long as that beautiful soul-lamp yet glimmered, the strength that is born of suffering, the faith that is nurtured by woe, was hers. And, should she watch it sink quite away, and see in its place gather a mighty cloud, even then, though there might be agony, there would still be faith; for it would only exchange firmaments, set on earth to rise in heaven.

By and by the babe slept, and, taking it gently from her breast, she placed it beside the sick sisters, and then paced rapidly up and down the room, to relieve the numbness that was insensibly palsying

her limbs. After a while, she paused by the fireside, fanned with her breath the few dying coals, and then, with an agued hand and a sick heart, placed upon them her last stick. As the smoke wreathed around it, she wrung her thin, cold hands; as the flames slowly lapped it, and the rough bark dropped off in brilliant flakes, the tears streamed down her cheeks, and, in a voice tremulous with the knell of life, she whispered, "It is the last! God, O God, be merciful to us when it is burnt!"

II.

In a lofty dwelling, magnificent without and within, located in one of the most aristocratic streets of the same city of A——, dwelt George Staunton, the owner of that little miserable hut wherein, on that severe winter night, a mother was so sorely tried. The only heir of one of the wealthiest families in the place, dowered at birth with good looks and a princely heritage, idolized by his parents, petted by their friends, and waited upon slavishly by their attendants, it was no wonder that his naturally noble disposition should have been despoiled of its beauty and its strength,—that he was wilful as a child, and capricious as a youth, and that, never having drank in the essence of pure religion, he should have had no power to conquer disappointments, but, under their rigid discipline, became an irritable, unjust, selfish man. He had talents of a

high cast, and it was his pride to cultivate them; and these, united to his manly figure, prepossessing countenance, and length of purse, made him, on attaining his majority, courted by all the society in which he mingled. The old paid him attention for the sake of the young; the young doted on him for the sake of himself.

At the age of twenty-five his heart was touched by a pure and holy passion, and he tendered then his hand, his affections, his wealth, his all, to one who seemed, in his eyes at least, gifted with angel charms. The accepted lover of the beautiful Annie D——, he seemed a changed man, so gentle, so kind, so unassuming, so everything which makes glorious the human character, which haloes it with the likeness of divinity. But, alas for the perfection of earth, and the hopes of mortals! There appeared, suddenly, a moustached foreigner in the gay circles of A——, a Russian count, with an unpronounceable name; and great was the sensation he produced. It was not long ere he singled out the betrothed of Staunton as the object of his special attentions. And, poor Annie! the idea of being a countess, of gazing from castle battlements upon a husband's serfs, of wearing gems which had come down from antiquity, of mingling with lords and ladies of royal blood,—it turned what little brain she had, and upset her little heart completely. Staunton was tossed out, and in his place nestled the whiskered count.

From that time, Staunton was an irritable man,

distrustful of everything and everybody, believing that virtue existed on earth only in name. The death of his parents occurring soon after the severe disappointment of his affections, by sundering, as it were, his last affectional ties, seemed to finish the sad work of ruin to his heart. He became gloomy, morose, stern. The angelic of his nature was frightened by the devilish; the anthem of his soul was hushed, and its now darkened chambers resounded only with the hell-howls of heated passions. But a miserable man he was; the skeleton was in his own heart, and, go where he would, the clatter of its naked bones would scare away the latent hope, the budding joy. He travelled, but came home more miserable than he went away; he studied, but knowledge was an agony; he added to his wealth, and accumulated sorrow. He looked upon life as men do when the cataract has nearly veiled their sight, and saw everything distorted and ugly. Without faith in man, without faith in God, he lived a wretched life, dreading lengthened years, and yet fearing the tomb.

III.

The little stick upon the widow's fire was consumed. A few small coals alone glimmered in the ashes. An icy chill stole over the apartment, and the wing of death seemed shadowing the devoted inmates. The mother ran to the shed, to see if there were not a few chips remaining,—something that

would blaze, if it would not warm. But all too carefully had she gleaned there the day before; there was nothing to replenish her spent fire; the hearth must grow cold, and with it human hearts.

She went back to the desolate home, thinking to press one more kiss upon the white face of the dead, and then lie down beside the suffering living and die together. But, as she entered the room, one of the twins greeted her with the cry, "O, I'm so cold, *so cold*, mother! Make a fire, *do*, and warm me." That plaint from her child deadened the intent of despair, and, with the instincts of nature fresh and beautiful again, she ran to the low bed, and sought, by folding to her bosom the sick child, to give it a little warmth, to shield it from the wintry air, and hush its moans with the lullaby of love; but, as her cold hand touched it, it shrieked aloud and waked up the other two, who, joining its cries, almost convulsed with agony the pale, worn creature who bent above them. She would first take one and then another of the screaming children in her arms, and strive, by friction, to restore or give them warmth; and then, laying them as closely as possible together, would draw the poor rags that served as an apology for bedding closer, if possible, around them, and wind herself as best she could about them, pressing all the while frantic kisses on their wet cheeks, and praying aloud.

Suddenly a thought flashed over her,— a strange, wild, bewildering thought. But a little distance from her, on the opposite side of the lane, was an

extensive wood-yard, of which her wealthy landlord was the proprietor. It was surrounded only by a dilapidated fence; there were no guards, no dogs; it was late in the night; the neighborhood was quiet; a few sticks would never be missed, and a few, an armful, would save them from death by freezing. "It is not, it cannot be a sin," exclaimed she, passionately, "to give my dying children the light and warmth of fire. God, and all good men and women, will justify it as a holy act. By morning, it will be over with the two; I will see the three buried, and then little Willie and I will find our way to that last refuge of poverty, the alms-house! That I should have come to that! — yes, I will go;" and she rushed desperately from the house. But, once out under the clear, blue, star-gemmed sky, brilliant with the light of a full moon, and her conscience shivered, and she shrank back. But those feeble moans drove her forth again, and she hurried over the crisp snow, and across the slippery paths, nor paused till, breathless, she stood beside the fence that only half hid what was more precious to her then than would have been mines of gold. She bowed herself to crawl through a break, then hastily stood upright, and, crying pitifully "I cannot do it!" fled to her home. But those same moans greeted her again, the moans of those loved ones who together had nestled once beneath her heart — their dying moans!

She went again to the door. "If the moon did not shine so bright," said she; "if it were only as

my heart is now, a dark, howling, tempest-lashed night, I could do it,—but it is so bright, the whole host of heaven seems watching me. O, sin, sin, thou art indeed a fearful thing!" And then she stood and looked above, and around, and on to where lay piled up cord upon cord of fuel. The sight of that maddened her, and, as her children shrieked, with an added tone she cried, "I will do it, sin or no sin," and rushed, flew rather, to the tempting yard. She did not pause to think now, but crawled through the gap, and, seizing hold of the first sticks she could reach, she filled her arms. Like a scorpion's sting seemed the touch of each,—she started with the load —dropped it, and fled again. Had hell with all its furies been upon her heels, not faster would they have ran. She did not pause at the threshold, but rushed into the still, sad, holy room, and, flinging herself upon the bed where wailed the little innocents to whom she had given birth, she resolved to die beside and with them. "Only," moaned she, "let the hour come quickly!"

But the tempter was yet only bayed. Those dying moans, fainter than before, were yet more pleading, more touching. She could not endure it; and, telling them, in a voice hoarse with agony, that she would bring some wood, she again rushed out, heeding now neither the starlight nor moonlight, the cloudless sky or the snow-white earth, the fear of man or the fear of God,—all, everything was forgotten but her dying twins. She again crawled through

the gap; she again filled her arms; she regained the lane with her burden, the sacrifice of love to sin, and retraced with electric speed her footprints, and crossed her threshold. But there her honest heart grew faint and sick beneath its load, and back she went with it, nor now threw it down, but deliberately piled it up in the place whence she had taken it. "And now," said she, as she turned away, "I WILL go home and die!"

She reached again her hovel, and again threw herself beside her babes, and prayed for death. But her heart, instead of ceasing its pulsations, seemed only to throb the faster and the louder, while every nerve seemed to quicken with new life as those continued moans fell so softly and so sadly on her ear. "I must do it," she exclaimed, at length, starting up with a maniac fierceness; "yes, I must — it is my destiny to die a thief! I will fulfil it; and then, O God, deal with me as thou wilt!" and again she traversed the snowy path, again crawled through the gap, again filled her arms, and again dropped the load, and then did what she had not done before there — *prayed.*

Yes, on that cold, bitter, midwinter night, out there in a wood-yard, the calm blue sky, brilliant with starlight and moonlight, bending over her, half-famished with hunger, half-frozen with cold, the wind fluttering her rags in the blast, the crisp snow cutting into her sore knees, the frost palsying her purple hands, the tears freezing on her cheeks, her

dark hair blowing about her brow like the shadows of death,— out there, with three little ones freezing at home, without one stick, one chip, or one cent to buy them,— then and there that woman, that mother, prayed, and prayed with all the intensity of which an humble Christian is capable; her words, repeated again and again, being simply, "*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*"

First, she spake them as quick as the syllables could drop from her tongue, as though she hoped thus to make the Father lend his ear; then more slowly came they, and between them she seemed lost in holy thought; and then, after a little silence, came other words, and, half-talking, half-praying, she told over her griefs to God, and said amen, and turned away to die with her little ones. "A few hours, at the most, of agony," said she, "and then we shall have an eternity of bliss."

She entered the room where moaned yet those little dying creatures; she lay down beside them; she kissed their damp faces; she pillowed their sick heads on her bosom, and, whispering "Come quickly, quickly, death!" closed her eyes, and strove to press the hand of the white angel upon her heart. A few moments she lay in silent agony; for, though ready to go, though longing for the moment, she could not die in peace while yet those children moaned for fire.

The sudden swinging back of the outside door, and the tumbling of what seemed strangely like sticks

of wood, roused the human in her once again, and, starting up, wondering whether it were not the illusion of a dream, though she was sure she was awake, she ran to the dark hall, and, O, the frenzied joy of her heart, as she stumbled on an armful of wood, and knew by her bruised limbs the sticks were not the phantoms of an excited fancy. "God, God be thanked!" cried she. "Thou hast led me out of temptation, and delivered me from evil."

Ere the sun had fairly risen, upon the table where lay the cold form of the little brother lay also the beautiful twin sisters. But, ere their eyes closed forever upon earth, they had lain in their mother's arms before a blazing fire,—her wish being granted, that her darlings might be warm once more before they were cold forever.

IV.

"Devils cast out! What does it mean? I am sure I can't understand it. Can you tell me, father?" exclaimed a bright-eyed, beautiful, curly-headed boy of seven, as he threw down his Testament and ran to a fine-looking man, with a most charmingly-blended intellectual and benevolent cast of countenance. "Say, father, what does it mean?"

A strange look shadowed for a moment the calm, noble brow of the parent; but, passing, it left an added spirituality of expression, and, taking the child upon his knees, he toyed a little while with the

brown ringlets, and then, kissing with passionate fondness the full, rich lips, he said, "I will tell my little boy a true story about a man of my acquaintance, who had a devil cast out.

"It was one of the coldest winter nights that was most ever known. Everything outdoors was white with snow, which, lit up with the full moon and a host of stars, made the earth seem but as a vast mine of gems. About ten o'clock, that night, a gentleman stood by his parlor window, looking out into the still street, and seeming to be lost in deep thought. And so he was; but his thoughts were cruel, were wicked, for he was a wicked man. When you get older, I may, perhaps, tell you all about how he came to be so wicked. He was thinking now about one of his tenants, a poor widow, who, with her four little children,—a pair of twin daughters about seven years old, a little boy of three or four, and a *wee* son, who had seen but six months,—lived in a little, old, ruinous hut, on the skirts of the city. He knew this poor woman was almost starved and frozen with poverty; he knew she had three sick children, for he had been there the day before to collect his rent; but, instead of thinking now that he would wrap himself up and go and carry her some food, and give her permission to go into his wood-yard and take all the fuel she wanted, he was determined to go and see if he could not catch her stealing; and, if he could, why, then he would gratify his cruel, revengeful, morose, stern nature, by punishing her.

"Well, he put on his furs, and off he went, and noiselessly he stole up to the hovel, and peeped into a window at the head of the bed. O, such a sight as he saw! It would make your little heart ache to see it only painted. Suffice it, the little boy lay dead upon the table, and the two little sisters lay dying on the bed, and the mother was walking the floor to keep herself and baby from freezing, and there was not a spark of fire, and no light but what was given by the bright moon. And the man heard the poor dying children cry for fire to warm them, and he saw the mother do her utmost to comfort and still them; he saw her rub their little wasted limbs, and carry first one and then the other about; and he said, wickedly, "She can't stand it long; she will steal soon!" and a savage joy burned in his bad heart.

"Well, to make a long story short,—for I want to get through ere mother comes in, because she can't bear such sad stories,—that poor woman, made desperate by the dying cries of those darling children, resolved to take a few sticks of her landlord's wood. But she was so truly good and pious, that, though she went four or five times to the yard to steal, her conscience would not let her do it, and at length she resolved to die as she had lived, an honest woman; and then, out there on the snow, with all that wood around her, she prayed that God would deliver her from evil, and lead her not into temptation. And, my little son, what do you think that prayer did for the wicked man who had, unseen by

her, followed her there, and lay hidden behind one of the piles?

"My son, my son," and the father clasped his boy convulsively, passionately, to his heart, "that prayer cast out the devil that was in him, that had been in him for years."

"And, O, I hope, father," said the boy, with enthusiasm, "God had a little angel all ready to fly right in, and make him as good as he had been bad; did he, father?"

"Something flew in, my son; an angel, I suppose it was, for it whispered to him beautiful thoughts, and then led him to do beautiful deeds."

"And what did he do, father? I know what I would have done."

"What, my son?"

"I would have ran after her with as much wood as I could carry, and tossed it into her hall, and then went home and brought a great basket-full of good, nice things for sick folks,—such things as mother gives us when we are sick,—and, O dear, I don't know what I would n't have done! Did he do so, father?"

"He did, my son."

There was a long silence. Then the child spoke again: "Did the dear little girls die, father?"

"They did; they died before morning, and on the third day after, they, with their little brother, were buried in one grave; and the angel that flew into the wicked man's heart told him to place over the grave

a beautiful white stone, with the figures of three sweet little children carved upon it, and to plant flowers all around it, and whenever he felt bad or wicked to go there and pray."

"And does he, father? and does it keep the devil from coming back?"

"He does go there often, my son; and it has so far kept the devil away, though he has tried hard to enter into his heart again; but I hope, I think, now, he never will."

"O, I hope not either; it must be so nice to have a little angel there! But, father, what became of that little baby that was left, and the poor mother,—did they die, too?"

"I will tell you their story some other time, my dear. I hear mother's step now, and I don't want to worry her with such sad thoughts."

And, putting down his little step-son Willie, George Staunton went to the door to meet his wife,—that wife whose prayer had cast the devil out!

I HAVEN'T THE CHANGE.

"I HAVE N'T THE CHANGE."

THE short November afternoon was about half spent, when the door of the chamber, wherein my friend, Mrs. Mann, and myself were enjoying a cosey chat, was pushed open by the middle-aged Irishwoman, who had been, since the dusk of morning, hard at work in the kitchen, and, entering quietly, she made to us both a most respectful obeisance.

"Ah, Bridget, is that you?" said Mrs. Mann, looking up, with a pleasant smile; "you have finished, then, have you?"

"Indade, ma'am, and I have thin. The clothes bees all on the line, and looking well, too, though it's meself that says it, ma'am."

"I don't doubt it, Bridget; your clothes always look well. And very smart you have been with them, too."

"Well, thin, ma'am, I did me endeavors to make all the haste I could and not spare the dirt; for the childer be lonely, ma'am, these cold days, and I bees always worried about them with the care of the fire; for they have n't much thought, the darlints!"

While she was speaking my friend rose, and, going to her work-stand, opened the drawer, and took from

thence her port-monnaie. She looked worried as she held it a half-moment in her hand.

"I am sorry, Bridget, but really I forgot to ask Mr. Mann for any change at dinner; and I have n't a cent myself, nothing less than an eagle. Will it make any difference if you don't have it to-day?"

The light faded from the hopeful blue eye, and a shadow touched the placid brow. But she answered, cheerily:

"Could ye give it me, ma'am, should I come up after the tay is over?"

"Well, no, Bridget, for Mr. Mann will not be home till late this evening. But you can have it to-morrow morning, or any time after, whenever it is convenient for you to call. I am very sorry I forgot it."

"Well, ma'am," said the woman, turning to go, "I will call betimes in the morning, and I am obleeged to you for the day's work." There was a mournful cadence in her voice, that touched, as with magic, a hidden memory in my heart, and I spoke eagerly to my friend, as the door closed upon her:

"Call her back, Alice; I will lend you the change."

"O no; don't trouble yourself," said she; "it will do as well to-morrow."

"Call her back," I exclaimed, more earnestly. "It will not do as well,—I know it, I feel it; do call her."

She did so, for there was, in spite of my efforts to

speak calmly, an impassioned emphasis in my tones that she could not resist.

The woman returned, with a surprised look, saying, "And did ye call me, ma'am? and be I wanted yet?"

"I did call you, Bridget. My friend has lent me the change;" and she handed her the half-dollar. "I am glad she could spare it, for it will save you the trouble of calling again."

"O, thanks to ye, thin, ma'am," curtseying to her, and turning to me with a like reverence. "Ye have relaved my heart of a heavy load; may anither like it niver rest on yer own!"

"Did you, then, need the money so very much?" said my friend; for it was evident, from the woman's looks and actions, that it came to her with the beauty of a sudden blessing.

"Indade, and that did I, thin. It's the day, ma'am, when my month's rent is due; and my landlord bees very strict with his tinants, and, if they have n't the money at the morning, they must at the night, or lave forthwith. He's not so hard a man, either, for he keeps his rints in a good way, and charges niver a happorth too much; but he's strict with the dues. So I told the childer, if he came this morning, to tell him I would bring it to him this night; and I was wanting yet the quarter, ma'am, to make up the two dollars; and O, ma'am, if the blissed lady had n't lent ye the money, meself and me poor, fatherless childer would ha' made, per-

chance, their beds in the strate to-night. And thin, too, I had promised the darlints a loaf when I came back to them; for to make up the rint and buy the coals has kept me close this month, and ne'er a bit of anything but their praties have they had for a couple of days; and I was feeling bad, when I turned away, for the disappointment of them, but most because of the rint; but it's all over, and I'm obleeged to ye both. Good-by to ye, ladies, and the Lord above bliss ye!"

I could see that the tender heart of my friend was deeply moved at the brief tale of the simple-hearted Irishwoman; and, as she followed her into the hall and down stairs, I was curious enough to steal on after them, and see whether they stopped. I returned to the chamber, after a few moments, with a happy glow of spirits, and I feasted, that night, on the luxuries which crowned the tea-table, with a keener zest, knowing, as I did, that the children of poor Bridget were satisfying their famished palates, not from the "praties" of their own scant larder, nor from the white loaf of the baker's shelf, but from the cold meats and healthy pastry of my friend's well-stored pantry.

"She owes it all to you, Carrie," said Mrs. Mann, breaking suddenly the revery into which we had both fallen, as we sat beside the parlor-grate, after the pleasant supper was over. "She owes it all to you that she is not a houseless wanderer; and I owe it to you that I am not guilty of a fearful sin,—the sin

of turning her from home on this frosty night. O, it has been a fearful but a blessed lesson. Never again will I be without the change to defray the wages of my help, even though I must go miles after it, or sacrifice never so much of my own comfort.

"'I have n't the change,'" continued she, speaking slowly and solemnly; "how like a death-note those words must have come to her! O, I begin, Carrie, to feel that what you said the other day is true,—there is no such thing as a little duty; for, indeed, every duty involves considerations that are potent in some quarter.

"But how came you to think of it so suddenly? and what led you to speak as you did? Your tones thrilled my heart."

"The memory of what one poor widow suffered for the want of a little change. Do you remember old Mrs. C., who lived with me when Frank was a baby?"

"What, that good old Granny C., as the children used to call her?"

"Yes, she. Well, almost her whole life was one tedious series of sorrows; and sometimes, when we sat together in the nursery, she would unburthen her heart of its heavy loads, by narrating some of them. Among the many she told me, that which, in my memory, I have called her darkest one, was that which resulted from the careless words of a wealthy lady:

"'I HAVE N'T THE CHANGE.'"

"Only four, only four!" moaned the poor woman, as she dropped her weary head upon the pillow, and drew again the scanty bed-clothes closely around her shivering shoulders; "I was so in hopes it would strike six. O dear, if I had but a plenty of oil! but I must wait for daylight. I pray Heaven the sun may be up when I wake again.

"I am glad *they* sleep so soundly," placing her thin hands upon the heaving hearts of the two children, who lay at her side, locked in childhood's happy slumber. "O, if they would only sleep till noon! Poor things, they will be starved before their supper is earned. *O, how hard, how hard it is to be so poor!* Can I bear it?" Her whispers were hushed a few moments, and then there struggled up, through the bitter sobs that filled her throat, the anguished words, "*I must! I must!*" And then she buried her face in that pillow, which had been damp for years with her midnight sighs, and wet it with fresh tears. And then she prayed — prayed for strength to endure, and for bread to put into the starving mouths of her darling babes. She prayed as only a widowed mother can pray, when on her shelf there lies no single crust, and but two small potatoes,— when in her little purse there jingles not even coppers. With tears and prayer came temporary peace; the cry of her heart was hushed, and patience, as it often had before, laid its soft fingers

on her lips, and sleep sealed for a while the fountain of deep grief.

Hers was a sad, trite story; such an one as you may hear a dozen times in every lane or alley of our crowded cities; stories which, because they are so trite, scarcely affect our hearts, save to cause them, perhaps, one shiver and one sigh. We forget, in listening to them, that though they all seem so much alike that we might fancy they are but versions of one tale, yet each one has its hero or its heroine; that we must not weep for one, but many, O, how many! Ah! could they rise before us at one call, what an army of pale, famished creatures would stare at us through their wet eyes, clamor for charity with their white lips, pointing, as they spoke, with their ghostly fingers, to their lean, bloodless cheeks, or pressing them to those hearts whose slow, patient pulses seem to life like the passing bell. Then, indeed, would the great soul of humanity wake up as though sang to by angel voices; then would the first faint notes of the great anthem of millennium be whispered on earth.

Honest poverty had always been Mrs. C.'s lot. But through childhood and girlhood it had been cheerful poverty. The hearth was rough, but the fire burned brightly on it, and the kettle hummed pleasant hymns. And, as years passed on, romance lent a strange, sweet beauty to the ingle-lights, and for a little season life was a blissful boon. The maiden became the wife — the wife, a mother — and

the cup, though but an earthen one, was filled to the brim.

Four years of happy wedded life were allotted her, and then the shadows gathered, and dark indeed they were. For three years she endured all that a woman can endure and live, when bound to a drunken husband — nay, when fettered to a brute; for when a man becomes a drunkard, he then throws off humanity,— the angel flees, and the cloven foot comes trampling down the flowers upon which it was wont so sweetly to repose.

Seven years from her bridal day, Mrs. C. stood by an open grave, and saw lowered into it the corpse of him who had won her youthful love. Then, with a blanched face, she turned to her cellar-home, to her babes, not half as fatherless now as when he who owned that heavenly name was above instead of under the earth. She spent that first night in idle tears — nay, not in idle tears, but in such as the poet says rise

"From the depth of some divine despair."

Early the next morning, with a child clasping either hand,— the one a delicate, golden-haired girl of six, with that angelic look about the blue eyes that foretold of early death; the other a bright, black-eyed, dark-haired boy of five, restless with the same passions as those that had burned so fiercely in his sire,— with these, her only household treasures, the widow sought a way to live. There was

but one path open to her; for she could not, would not, be parted from her little ones. *She must sew.* SEW! and yet she was no machine, no bloodless, pulseless, soulless combination of wood and iron, but a frail, delicate woman. But the fiat had gone forth, and with her slender fingers of bone and flesh, and nerves and veins, her human fingers, she must earn a living for herself and children. Earnestly, faithfully, she strove to do it. The earliest light of morning found her busy; the midnight bell did not always still her toil.

She had been thus for two years a patient, unflagging laborer. She had thus far kept them sheltered, though their home had been either in a dusty garret or a damp cellar; and she had kept a glimmering of fire upon the hearth, and some coarse fabrics on their shoulders, and the plate from being empty. But the long and severe illness of her little girl, now almost an angel, had sorely straitened her ever-scanty means, and she had gone to bed, the Sabbath night before the morning when we hear her moaning "Only four! only four!" as she listens to the clock, without even one crust of bread — two potatoes and a teaspoonful of tea being the sole contents of her pantry. No wonder is it that the winter night seemed so long and tedious; no wonder that she longed for the sunlight to come again; for, until it came, she could not sew, and until she had sewed and sewed, the livelong day, she and her little ones must go starved.

The first faint beams of daylight found her drawn

close beside the little window, busy with her needle. She had built a scanty fire, put down the two potatoes to roast, made and drank a cup of tea, and now sewed with the energy of despair, only raising her eyes to look, once in a while, upon her sleeping children, and hoping and praying their slumber would last long.

"They will be *so* hungry when they wake," moaned she, "what shall I do with them? and little Nellie is so frail and feeble, she loathes our coarse, unpalatable fare. O, if they could but sleep till night; then, how gladly I would waken them! It will be a long, sad day! but with evening, thank God, I shall have some money!" and then she spurred her sore and aching fingers.

She was busied upon a dress for a wealthy and fashionable lady, who employed, sometimes, such an humble seamstress, as she said, from charity, though in reality only to save a few shillings to invest in trifles for herself. No mantua-maker would have made the garment Mrs. C. was now employed upon for less than two dollars, and the lady knew it well; but she carried it to the poor widow, and told her, if she would do it for seventy-five cents, she would leave it there. Eagerly did the half-starved, all-tired creature clutch at it. All Saturday she bent over it, and until the clock struck the holy chime of Sabbath rest; and now she must work till twilight on it yet, for there was a deal of trimming.

And so she sat and sewed that whole long day,

nothing passing her thin lips but a dish of weak tea at the breakfast and dinner hour, and hearing all the time the passionate clamors of her boy for bread, or something to eat, and marking, with an anguish worse than death, the pale, sad face of her sick child, who did not ask for food with her white lips, but only seemed to pray for it in her meek, earnest, upward glances.

"It curdles my heart, now," she would sometimes exclaim, when telling of it, though a score and more of years had passed since the day was over, "curdles it only to remember what I suffered. Hell never had a torture equal to it."

With the last ray of light the last stitch was set, and then, folding it with maniac quickness, with a strength born of agony she rushed from the clamorous cries of the boy, and the mournful looks of the sick girl, out into the darkening street, and across the city, to the palace-home of her employer. She reached it, rang, was ushered up the long and splendid flight of stairs, and stood before the lady, and gave up her work. Very carefully was it examined; scarcely a stitch but that was scrutinized; but it bore inspection. A mother, toiling for starving children, would not dare to slight her work. Then the lady drew out a tasselled purse, and felt a while amid golden coins and rustling bills; then turned to the patient, expectant woman, and said, very quietly, as though it were an ordinary sentence, and not the

death-warrant of a holy hope, "*I haven't the change.* Call again."

With a face on which all the horrors of madness were written, the poor seamstress turned away, and went down the stairs, and through the hall, and into the street. But once there and her agony must find vent, or reason would have died. She flung herself upon the huge white drift, and prayed for death; prayed, yes, shrieked for it,— so fearfully, too, that the bystanders thought she was an escaped lunatic, and ran for help to secure her, lest she harm them. She ran once to her dark cellar-home, but had no strength to enter. She could not face her babes. Down to the brink of the river she found her way, and was about to spring into the icy tide, when the thoughts of those babes left motherless came to her scorched brain like water to a maddened flame, and she turned once more to that cellar-home. Noiselessly she stole to the door, and placed her ear beside it. She heard the low, sweet voice of her suffering Nell, telling her brother of the glass of milk and the warm bun she was soon to have; and she heard, too, the loud, wild shouts of her healthful boy, as he told of the sausage and white bread mother would bring him. More and more frenzied she became; she prayed again and again for death; but her hour was not, would not come, and at length she rushed forth again into the crowded streets, and did what in a sane moment she would never have endured to think of — she begged!

Heaven answered then the prayers of that patient

child at home; for, though the first half-dozen heeded not her clamorous petitions for bread, for she asked no more, the seventh turned not so coldly from her. He was a wealthy stranger, seemingly,— she never knew his name, but she said, next to the faces of her mother and her children, she should seek for his in heaven, and if it were there know and bless it,— he, settling with his coachman ere he was driven to the night-train, threw her a half-dollar, and, entering the carriage, was out of sight ere she could speak one word of thanks.

That half-dollar! O, money that time was a blessing; one, too, so bright and glad, it seemed dropped down from God's own hand. The traveller, perhaps, forgot it as soon as it was given; but the widow and her babes never forgot to pray for him. Little Nell blessed him with her dying breath, and said, if little child-angels were allowed to come down from heaven, she would watch over him, next to her mother; and little Willie, until the day when he, too, passed so suddenly and so sadly from his mother's arms, talked often and earnestly of the time when he should be a man, and throw half-dollars to every poor woman or beggar-child whom he should see. So much and so often did they pray for him, so many blessings did they call upon his head, that they forgot, both mother and children, sorely as they had been wronged, they forgot to *curse* the lady, who had almost been the death of three, by her careless words, "I have n't the change."

THE ANONYMOUS LETTERS.

I.

Trust! trust, sweet lady, trust!

"MOPING in this dark, close room, on such a glorious morning!" exclaimed Annie Merton, as, with a fawn-like step, she bounded into the parlor of her friend Charlotte Earle: "how can you do so?" Why, I've been out since sunrise, and am brimfull of sweet, glad thoughts! Come, rouse up, my darling, and look at this sunshine and these flowers," as, throwing back the blinds, a flood of golden light leaped through the open casement, while at the same moment a shower of early blossoms, all wet with dew, fell over the white morning robe of the silent maiden.

"There, now," continued the free, wild visitor, parting the curls from the forehead of the fair creature, who sat motionless as a statue, her face half hidden by her hands, her eyes swollen with weeping, "there, now, let me wipe away all these tears. What matter if your lover is gone? 'Tis only for three short months, and then," lowering her voice into a soft whisper, "ah! then I am to robe

you in a satin garb, and twine a bridal wreath 'mid these dark tresses."

Then, with a gush of bird-like music, she sung,

> "There 's a whispered vow of love
> As side by side they stand,
> And the drawing of a snow-white glove
> From a little trembling hand,
> And the glitter of a ring,
> And a tear, that none may chide, —
> These, these have changed that girlish thing,
> And she is now a bride."

"Laugh, now!" and she bent with sisterly tenderness over the now bowed and shivering form. "I promised Edward I would be your comforter; and, with a heart light as a feather, I 've come this morning to you, the merriest sprite you ever dreamed of! So, hie up, my darling, and let me charm away dull care. It 's a day for the woods, and let 's be off and away to them, and a right glad time we 'll have, albeit deserted by our beaux.

"Do smile, dear Lottie!" and she took down her hands, but shuddered as she touched them, they were so cold, so bloodless.

"What is the matter?" screamed she, in frightened tones, as, gazing at the wet face she had uncovered, she marked how very pale and sad it was. "Tell me, tell me, dearest; you grieve for something more than the absence of your loved one. Speak, Lottie, speak; you craze me with your wild, deep grief."

The ashy lips moved not; the teeth were set, as in

a spasm. Whiter grew the face; deeper sunk the lines of anguish; faster flowed the tears. Her hands now pressed her head with nervous touch, as though to quiet an awful thought; and then were folded with passionate earnestness over her heart, as if to still a maddening throb.

Annie gazed at her with flooded eyes and quivering muscles. She felt that her friend was suffering an agony so deep, so intense, that words could not tell it, that words could not comfort her. She clasped her in her arms as a mother would a darling child; she stroked gently the long, dark curls; she kissed the knit brows. Their two hearts felt each other's throbbings; their clasped hands thrilled with each other's nerves; their tears mingled in one wild flood.

Excessive, violent emotion cannot long be borne. The frail form of Lottie was weakened by a whole night of sorrow — lonely, crazing sorrow, such as makes the weak human heart long to be pulseless, because then pangless. A few moments of unrestrained weeping and sobbing ensued; then, rising, she drew a damp, crumpled letter from her bosom, and, placing it in Annie's hand, strove to gain a sofa, but sunk upon the floor in a swoon so like to death, that her young friend thought life had indeed departed.

She uttered a frenzied cry for help; none came. Alone she bent over the white, still body; with a strength born of terror she raised it in her arms, and bore it to the porch. The motion woke a dull, slow

beating of the heart; cold water dashed from a flower-vase that stood near, and the free, fresh, out-door air, aided in quickening the weak pulse. The lips parted with a short, quick gasp; a faint breath ruffled the lungs.

Once assured that it was but a swoon, Annie had courage to ply the usual remedies; and, though for some minutes with but slight success, at length gazed again into the dark, sad eyes of Lottie, and met a look of recognition.

"She will not die," she whispered, and renewed her care so eagerly, so constantly, that, in an hour's time, her friend, with only her assistance, had power to gain her chamber.

"Let me lie down, Annie, and do you come and sit beside me. But first turn the key. It would kill me to see another face than yours."

Annie obeyed, and was sitting at the bedside, observing carefully the life-beat in Lottie's wrist, when the latter, seizing with frantic grasp the yet trembling hands of her watcher, exclaimed, "The letter! the letter!"

"I dropped it when you fainted. I've not since thought to get it."

"Find it! find it, Annie,—quick, or I go myself!" and, with momentary strength, she sprang from her pillow.

"Rest, Lottie, rest. It is not lost, I know. I will bring it in a moment."

"Now, now!" screamed she. "For worlds I

would not have a stranger see it. Enough for us to know its awful tale."

Her hands, clenched till the nails entered the soft palms, were held convulsively to her heart; her unstrung nerves shook like aspen-leaves in a tempest; her brain whirled with fearful dizziness; every breath seemed a throe of agony, every thought a pang of despair.

She clutched the restored letter with maniac wildness; held it at arm's length, as though afraid to see a word; then thrust it into Annie's hand, crying, "Read, read, and pity me!"

Confident that she held now the fatal cause of Lottie's woe, Annie, with rapid glances, devoured the contents of the closely-written sheet. Her countenance was always the index of her thoughts; and, knowing this, the eyes of the sufferer on the bed were fixed so intently upon it, that its slightest variation was marked. Amazement, with incredulous questionings, first flashed over it; then horror dragged its dark shadow there, while a shudder shook the reader's limbs; contempt next curled the lip and scowled the eyebrows; but, as she finished the task of perusal, they, and all the lesser emotions which had trembled on her face, centred in fierce, furious indignation. It flashed, burned, scintillated in her eye, till it transformed her whole visage. She no longer seemed a giddy, joyous maiden, but a firm, stern woman, whose heart had been touched to its core.

"False, false!" exclaimed she, with terrible em-

phasis, trampling the letter under her feet; "every line, every word of it, is false! I'd be the meanest worm that creeps in slime, sooner than own the conscience of the writer. Singe, scorch him! Ay, and more,—it will be a living coal, red-hot in his bosom till death puts it out!"

"This, then, is what has moved you so?" continued she, addressing Lottie, and picking up the scorned letter; "this thing, to which the hand that penned it dared not write its name; this has sent joy with wild shrieks from your bosom, and ushered in doubt, distrust and anguish, with their thorns and poisons. Lottie, you do not, you have not loved Edward as you ought, or this letter would never have been the herald of such terrific sorrow. Say," and she grasped her hands and gazed into her eyes with the penetrating look of one who would read the most hidden thought,—"say, did you credit it?"

"No."

"Why, then, did you let it trouble you? Why suffer it to almost madden your brain, and break your heart, if you thought it but a lie?"

"Spare me, spare me, Annie! I did not, could not think it true; and yet I did not, could not think one human being could so belie another. Indeed, in truth, I do not know what I have thought. I only feel that I have passed through a night which, I pray Heaven, may never darken your sunny life. O, I was so blessed last evening! With a letter full of love and sympathy—a letter from my Edward;

I sat here, and in thought answered it. My heart was revelling in a bliss so keen, so pure, as to be almost unearthly. I saw the present all bright with cloudless skies; I saw the future spanned with a bow of promise. My past sad life seemed like a dream. A thank-offering to God for all his mercies, all his blessings, leaped to my lips. Then, at that moment even, when *amen* was quivering on my lips, the letter, the one you hold, was placed in my hand. Mechanically I opened it, for my thoughts were elsewhere. By the failing daylight I glanced over its strange characters. My heart froze within me as I deciphered it. Enough of sense remained to conceal it in my bosom. Then all was dark; my breath came with a spasm; my blood curdled; I was conscious of falling, and, it seemed to me, in a deep, black pit. The moon was shining bright when I again became conscious of life. I have an indistinct remembrance of lying for a long while in a state of agony, crushed to the earth, and held there, it seemed, by some nightmare hand. I would strive to grapple it, and then forget it with weakness; seemed to draw a faint, feeble breath, and sink again, borne down by that mighty hand. And when I did come to,—when, pressing my heart, I felt the rustling of that letter, when the memory of its fearful tale rushed unbidden through my mind,—Annie, Annie, scorn me if you will!—not all my love for Edward could save me from a pang of anguish so bitter, so tearing, as to cut my very soul in twain." The thought of what

she had endured the past night seemed completely to master the little strength she had gained; and, with the weakness of a babe, she sunk back, faint, almost breathless.

"Be calm, dear, dear Lottie!" said Annie, bending over and kissing again and again the white lips and the wet cheeks. "Forgive me if I spoke harshly to you. Few, few there are who could be unmoved by such a letter as you read last night; and few there are who have such a deep, such an irrepressible antipathy to anonymous letters as myself. They are fearful missives. Now and then, one may be the warning of a timid friend; but oftener, almost always, indeed, are they the work of malignant enemies,—the handwriting of a human fiend, who with a snake's tongue bites in the grass, who with a coward's arm wounds in the dark.

"Lottie, put your arm around my neck, rest your head on my bosom, and read again that letter. Do not quiver so! Be strong with anger against the writer; be firm with trust in the innocence of the accused. I have known Edward since he was a child; till you came I was his dearest friend, the confidant of his most secret thoughts; and I know, as I know my heart now beats, that the stories penned in this letter are false. He never harmed a bird; he never caged one, even; think you, then, he could be the demon in a human form that he is here said to be? I tell you, Lottie (lay my words deep in your memory, too), if ever you discover the author

of this letter, you will find that it was written either from selfish or malignant motives,— perhaps from a blending of the two. True, it speaks of its disinterested love for you; that it would and must save you from the precipice over which you hang; that it would rescue you, a pet bird, from the fowler's snare; that it would snatch you, a white lamb, from the wolf's black arms; — but why does it not point you to the proof of its dark hints; why does it deal in such anathemas against your lover, and never tell you where to seek the truth of all that is alleged? Why, if it knew these things, did it not whisper them with living voice into your ear, ere you had given your love, plighted your troth, to Edward? or why, when it did speak, did it not come to you like a noble man or woman standing before you in his or her integrity, and make you feel, by words thrilling on earnest human lips, by tears gushing with sorrow for you from eyes that riveted your confidence, by the pressure of a friendly hand, by the trembling of a palpable form, that they had indeed your welfare in their mind, that they wounded but to heal? Why did the writer not, if the wish was to save you, come to you as a saviour, and not torture you with a letter worthy only an imp of perdition?" and the eyes of the young girl flashed fire, while the sparks fell on the tears which hung in Lottie's eyes so fast, so hot, they dried them up.

For a long time they sat without speaking, without moving. Lottie took the letter from Annie's

hand, and read it with a calm, scrutinizing eye. It was a long, closely-written epistle, purporting to come from an earnest, truthful friend, who wrote because urged by a feeling of duty which could not be restrained. It warned Lottie never to consummate her vow with Edward Owen, and gave reasons that might well pale the cheek of an innocent girl. It accused him of dark, foul, nay, devilish crimes; crimes worse than murder, for that harms only the *body;* its knife, sharp and bloody as it may be, has no power to cut or stain the soul. There was a spirit of malignity,— an infernal one, indeed,— breathing through every line, that had struck Annie at first sight, and would have equally affected her friend, had she received it in a calm moment. Now, it was evident to her; and when she had closed and folded it, she threw her arms around Annie's neck, and exclaimed, with passionate fervor, "I do not know, perhaps I never shall, how much of truth or falsehood there is in this; but I will trust him yet. Yes, the fire shall consume this; I will forget it, and at the altar give my hand to Edward, without one doubt. I will trust him yet, trust him ever!"

"Trust him I know, I feel, you may," responded Annie, in a tone of faith; "but, Lottie, do not burn the letter. Lock it up; never look at it; but do not destroy it. Failing with you, the hand that wrote that may contrive another plot."

A secret drawer in Lottie's desk received the unholy paper. With her hands clasped in Annie's, the

beautiful young creature, who had known a night of anguish, because a night of doubt, closed her weary eyes, and, murmuring softly "I trust, I trust," was in a few brief moments the guest of an angel, whose white wings were fresh from a sunny home in the land of dreams.

II.

"What want you, sir?"
"A wife!"
"Women are plenty—"
"Ay, but women fit for wives?"

Edward Owen had always been well-fed, well-clothed, well-treated; yet, until he became of age, had never known the blessing of a home. The sudden death of his father had ushered him prematurely into the world, and his first faint moan, blending with the death-cry of his mother, threw him upon it an orphan, with no near blood-tie to bind him to any mortal. But he had money, and that bought him a nurse in his infancy, an abode in his boyhood. He had friends, too, many, and true, and loving; but he was only one of many to them; they could not centre in him their dearest wishes and hopes. In his early days, when he saw the young lads with whom he played run home, leap on their father's knee, or lean by a mother's side, his heart would swell, and, with a sobbing voice he would exclaim, "O, that I had a father, a mother, a home!"

As he grew older, the wish for a home grew stronger. His first act, upon arriving at manhood, and coming in possession of his ample fortune, was to purchase a sunny field about a mile from his native village, and erect there a cottage. He had coveted the site years before he could command the means to purchase it. Often, when it was golden with the harvest, he had gazed upon its wavy outline; he had pictured a neat, white dwelling in its centre, with the shadows of green trees falling around it, the fragrance of flowers stealing in at its windows, the singing of birds, the rustle of leaves, and the dash of the brook blending in sweet melody upon the air. And then, too, he would pass through the open door, stopping to pluck a rose or train up a woodbine; and ever there did a fair, gentle being, with a kiss of love, spring forth to meet him. The rose he would twine in her jetty curls, the kiss he would repay with interest; then, entering the house, a vision of a well-ordered home would rise before him, and his cheeks would glow and his eyes grow bright. The spell broken, he would dash off the blinding tears, and, exclaiming "It shall yet be so," go back to wait the time.

That house, more beautiful than ever he in his early dreams had pictured it, now graced the spot where the laborer had so oft reaped his bread. Vines, flowers and shrubs, grew in rich luxuriance about it. Young trees swayed in the breeze, giving promise of refreshing shade ere many years should elapse. All

that wealth and taste could lavish upon grounds, to make them charm the eye and the mind, was freely given; and many a tourist, as he sketched the scene, envied the man who possessed a residence so lovely.

As inviting indoors as without was that new, that long-wished-for home. There was nothing wanting which comfort could ask for. Everything and more which he had there seen in his dreams, and which money could purchase, greeted Owen, each time he entered. But one thing was lacking — the lovely vision that was to walk like an angel by his side through the journey of life; and he felt his home was not yet perfect.

Money had bought him much; would it not purchase him a bride? O, yes; a fair, gay group of maidens would have sallied forth, almost any day, to let him choose a mate. Women (and to their shame, too, be it told!) are bought with gold in other than Eastern climes; and often do the father and the mother, reckless as the slave-master, stand by and barter to the highest bidder.

Owen wanted no wife who came only to his bosom for means to ornament her clay. He wanted — and what man does not? — a woman who could love him, let fate do her worse with him or his fortune; a woman who knew how to make him happy, and who would do so. He had resolution enough to wait patiently till he could find one who would answer the ideal of his heart; and so he went some years about,

studying the female character, and searching for a wife.

Once he fancied he had found her. Like the ideal of a poet's dream seemed the fair Isabel Voysez, as the eyes of Owen first gazed upon her. Bewildered with her beauty, for once his caution forsook him, and he became deeply interested in the young stranger ere he had half read her heart or mind. But he was not lost. He detected her in a falsehood; no very dark affair, indeed, but enough to bring him to his senses. A woman who could lie, deliberately sully her lips with an untruth, could never be his wife; and they parted.

"Am I always to live here alone?" sighed he, one summer evening, as he toyed with the flowers of his beauteous home; and then he wept. He should have smiled, for the star of his destiny was just then rising.

A carriage passed. "How beautiful!" exclaimed a voice, musical as the matin-hymn of a bird. Owen had a glimpse of a radiant young face. It haunted him all night, while the stranger's two words found an eternal memory in his thoughts.

That stranger was Charlotte Earle, a fair orphan, who had labored all her young life for a sick mother and brutal father, and who, having laid both beneath the sod, had been claimed by an aged uncle, and now tendered him the gentle offices of a kind, loving child.

In her Edward Owen believed he had found the

woman whose ideal had been so long the passion of his life. Yet, ere he offered her his hand, he travelled to the distant town where she had spent her early years, and satisfied himself entirely as to her character. A cool, calculating man, some called him; but it would be well for domestic peace, to say nothing of its happiness, if all exercised the same care in the choice of the bosom companion. Owen felt the responsibilities, the sanctity, of the married life, as few men do; he wanted perfect confidence in the woman who should take his hand at the altar; and, having been once deceived, held on to his throbbing heart till he could place it in a pure breast.

And, if ever man did plight his troth to a sinless girl, it was when Edward Owen took the hand of Lottie Earle, and whispered the lover's vow; and, if ever woman gave her heart to a noble man, it was at that same hour. Their engagement was a solemn, holy rite; had the clergyman and the ring been present, it would scarcely have been more sacred.

III.

A quiet home, a loving wife,
A smiling child; ah! this is life.

"True, is it not, Lottie?" asked Mr. Owen, as, after humming, in a sing-song tone, several times, the motto we have just written, he repeated it aloud.

"*You* seem to think so," responded his wife, in a

voice which, though gay, was yet thrilling with the love-accent which trembled on each word.

"I do, indeed, though it is not a very quiet one, just now, especially here. Can't I assist you, wife? You never 'll get all these things to rights again, if some one does not kindly lend a hand. Pray, what are all these?" as he looked a little curiously at a pile of papers, envelopes, cards, sketches, mementoes, and the like.

"Relics of early days, sacred as the tomb of Mahomet. Beware how you handle them, sir!" and, half in jest, half in earnest, she motioned him away.

"If they are indeed so valuable, you had best make haste and get them under lock and key again, for there 'll soon be one awake who 'll make sad havoc with them;" and, turning from them, he stepped to a cradle at a little distance, and gazed with a father's love and pride upon his first-born, a fair, sweet boy, who had just completed one year of life.

"How beautiful he is!" said he, in a tone peculiar to young parents; "a painter's dream could not be more so; and never could his pencil sketch a form so faultless, or his brush color a face so heavenly! Did you ever before, Lottie, see a child so young, whose countenance expressed so much?"

"Never, never!" replied she, with mock earnestness; "there never was just such a child born into the world, and there never will be another like him; he is alone in his glory, a prince-royal in *babydom*, or, as old Uncle expresses it, the '*knowinest*, *best*-

natured youngun' ever I saw! There, you 'll own now, sir, that you are outdone in baby-praise, won't you?" She laughed merrily, yet, at the same time, stole to his side, and gazed upon the sweet sleeper with a look as earnest, as proud, as loving, as that which illuminated her husband's face.

"Your heart spake in your words, despite your jesting tone," he whispered, as he marked the expression of her eye. "Is he not beautiful?"

"Have I not told you so a thousand times? And how could it be otherwise? The folks all say he is the image of his father!"

"I may infer, then, you think the father rather good-looking," said Owen, taking his wife's hands gently, and bending his full blue eyes upon her countenance, with the earnestness of one who would read her thoughts.

They thrilled her whole being with a wild, ecstatic quiver. Heart seemed to rush to heart, at the meeting of their eyes. She answered not in words, but, a moment after, pressed her lips to his, and he was satisfied.

Tears trembled upon both their faces as they turned away, she to her work, and he to his idle humming; yet both were happy.

It was a wet, cold, disagreeable day, impossible to go out, and unreasonable to expect company; one of those storms, indeed, which seem sent on purpose that housekeepers may have a good chance to set in order their pantries and their closets, their trunks

and drawers. Mrs. Owen had been all the morning hauling over household things, and "putting them to rights;" and, going incidentally to her desk, after dinner, had concluded to finish the day as she had begun, and accordingly her tables, chairs and stands, were soon littered with the miscellaneous contents of her antique secretary. She had intended to spend only a half-hour, or so, in reärranging them; but they freshened so many old memories, that she several times sat down with an old letter, a pressed flower brittle with age, a glossy ringlet, or, mayhap, only a card with a name faintly pencilled on it, and forgot the present, holding silent, sometimes sweet, and sometimes sad, communion with the past. The entrance of her husband had roused her from her reveries; and she prosecuted her task with more diligence, digressing only to stir the cradle and praise the baby.

She was busy again tying up and assorting billets and scraps, when her husband, after tiring himself of his monotonous pastime of tapping upon alternate windows and humming snatches of songs, busied himself in pushing in and out the drawers of the desk she was arranging, and in scrutinizing the carvings and gildings which adorned it.

"Pray, what antiquarian bequeathed you this old relic, Lottie? The hands that made it have been dust a hundred years, at least."

"It is an heirloom. All that I have, in substance, to remind me of my ancestors. Shabby as it

is, I value it highly. Modern handicraft might patent a more elegant piece of furniture, but none which could possess so many conveniences in such small space. Have you ever observed how many little nooks and corners it contains, Edward? Just let down the desk, and take a peep once into its mysteries."

He did as directed, and spent some moments in a busy survey of its interior; and, having satisfied his curiosity, he was about to close it, when a thought struck him, and he renewed his scrutiny.

"Ha!" exclaimed he, suddenly, "I thought it would be so; there is always some mystery in these old desks. Here are letters, too; I wonder if Lottie knew of this;" and he turned to question her, but was surprised to see her sinking into a chair, with trembling limbs and a blanched face.

He sprang quickly to her side, with affectionate inquiries as to the cause of the sudden emotion. It was some moments ere she could control herself sufficiently to speak, when, in a broken voice, she murmured something he could not comprehend about agony, letters, that secret drawer, memories of the past.

"Why do you tremble so, Lottie? Why weep so violently?" He paused, and then, as a thought flashed through his mind, he asked, earnestly, "Has any accidental discovery of that secret drawer been the cause of this sudden change? Did you know of its existence?"

She gasped out the single word, "Yes," and then threw her arms about him, clinging to him as a frightened child to its mother, and sobbing as though her heart would break.

He gazed upon her in mute amazement. There was a mystery in her wild grief he could not comprehend. She had been to him a second self; he knew her, he thought, as he knew his own heart; could it be that he had not read her all,— that in the past there was a page which she had hidden from his sight? A reminiscence leaped up from the oblivion into which, with silent scorn, he had once consigned it. A proud, haughty look flashed in his eyes. He bore her drooping form to the bed; then paced the room with rapid, nervous steps, glancing alternately at his pale wife and her old desk, as if hesitating what to do.

"This suspense is awful," said he, at last; "I cannot, will not endure it!" Then, advancing quickly to the drawer, which by mere accident he had discovered, he took from it all it contained — three letters; one that had evidently been read and wept over, and two with unbroken seals. He hurried with them to his library, locked the door, and, with eyes growing blind with tears, read hastily the one that had been previously opened.

"An angel!" cried he, passionately, as his mind gathered in its import; "yes, an angel in very truth, and I — a fool, a madman!"

Grasping the papers, he returned with fleet steps

to the bedside of his wife, clasped her in his arms, kissed her white cheeks till they were crimson, and her quivering lips till they were calm; and then, seating himself at her side, asked if she could give him the history of the letter he held, entreating her first to forgive and forget his momentary wavering of faith.

"Forgive *me*, rather, dear Edward! Forgive the wife for keeping from her husband the secret which chance or accident but now revealed to you. Often, during the first year of our married life, did it tremble upon my lips; but never, never would they move to utter it. It had a power over me I could not master; it stiffened the muscles, and scared the breath. Of la e, indeed for the last two years, I have scarcely thought of it; and when I did, it seemed but the wraith of a midnight dream, and I shut my eyes quickly, not wishing, not daring, to look at the spectre. I seemed to feel again that heavy yet fleshless hand; its icy fingers seemed straining my heart-strings, its dark palm pressing the life out! That night of agony, that night of doubt! Heaven spare me from another like it!

"Edward, will you spurn, will you despise me, when I tell you that the letter you have just read sent me, in frenzied grief, almost to the dark gate of death? Don't speak, don't answer me, till I have told you all about it."

Then, leaning her head on his bosom, in a low voice, tremulous with remembered anguish, she re-

lated the experience her soul had known on that summer night, when the letter, the long, closely-written, anonymous letter, with its wicked charges, had been received and read by her. And she told how the gentle Annie had come, like a white-winged angel, to her rescue, and borne her fainting, drooping form away, far away, from the black tide that was settling around it. How, like a spirit from above, she had infused fresh life in the veins of hope, and kindled anew the embers of faith. How that, with a confidence in her loved one, which facts, stern, grisly facts, alone could brow-beat, she had lain the letter away, and forgotten its base words in dreams as brilliant as sunset.

She told him, too, that when other letters came. though an involuntary shiver shook her nerves as she glanced on the well-remembered writing, her heart throbbed with a steady pulse, and she placed them in the spring-drawer beside the first, with a trust in him as firm, as sure, as dear, as when she first placed her hand within his own, pledging, thereby, her maiden troth. That she did so fearlessly, feeling, knowing that if the tales were true,—if, indeed, the writer had set his heart upon saving her from the life of wretchedness to which he assured her she was hastening,—he would, finding the letter fruitless, appear before her with facts to be scrutinized in sunlight. Three letters were received, within as many weeks; after that the mysterious writer troubled her quiet no more.

"And, in spite of them, you went to the altar with me! Tell me, dearest, did you go untroubled by doubt? Did no partial eclipse dim a little the sun which hung in your heavens?"

"There was not the shadow of a doubt, Edward. Think you that had there been one, I would have wedded you? *Never, no, never!* My heart would have dictated the right, and been firm in adhering to it, though it should afterwards have broken. No, Edward, believe me when I say it, there was not the slightest edge of a cloud on the disc of that sun that rose on our bridal morn; there has never yet been one, and — I know it, I feel it — there never will be!"

"Bless thee, bless thee, my angel wife!" cried Owen, folding her in his arms, and sealing the benediction with holy kisses; "a life of devotion to thy happiness shall repay thee for thy truth."

"And now, Lottie, listen to *my* tale. During that summer that I spent South, I received several letters of the same stamp as that I have just read, save that they made you the wicked one. Don't speak yet, wife, but hear what I did with them. I rung for lights every time I opened one, and every time held them over the lamps till they were half in flames, then placed them on the hearth, and watched them as they fast became light ashes."

"And did you never doubt me?"

"Never. The writer did not well mature the plot, though it was a double one, for it laid the scenes

of your iniquity in your old village home. And now I will tell you a secret, my wife. Before ever I lisped a word of love to you, I visited that old home, and learned that concerning you, from living lips, which no anonymous letter had power to make me doubt, for an instant. No; though they had come by scores every day, I should have lighted the papers and sent down to oblivion the thoughts. Until this day, my heart was never jealous of you; for a few moments, when you lay there gasping as with mental agony, I thought of those old letters, those moments,—a life of suffering seemed compressed in them,—but we will forget them, and you will forgive me!"

Her face was upturned to his, and he saw, by the dazzling love-lights that flashed over its fair features, that no words need be spoken to answer him. The subject was dropped, not forever, but for many a year.

IV.

> And, once committed, follows sin to sin,
> As in a chain successive links are strung.

It was midwinter. The day had been cold and gusty, with occasional flurries of snow. Just at night-fall the storm, which had been brewing for many hours, burst with a furious violence. The flakes fell so fast and thick, that the whole air betwixt earth and sky seemed but one porous mass of

snow. They flew before the wind, which had increased in wildness and strength, till its shrieks were appalling to the stoutest nerves; now circling over the frozen ground in maelstrom eddies, then drifting in huge piles, leaving here a bare black spot, and there a high, blanched mound. Moonless, starless, tempestuous, the night fast coming on promised to be one of unusual severity,—a night for the sheltered to shiver over their blazing fires, for the homeless to freeze with a winding-sheet of snow.

Many times, in the course of the afternoon, had Mrs. Owen laid aside her work, and gone to the porch, to gaze, with strained eyes, at the vehicles driving rapidly on the highway. Once she even put on her bonnet, and, with quick steps, traversed the distance that intervened between the house and the corn in the road. As the day wore on, and the sun with a livid disc, she became so intensely excited with anxiety, as to be almost beside herself. She actioned herself at the garden gate, heeded neither cold air or the falling flakes, but looked and listed with the keen senses of a loving wife. benumbed with cold, white with snow, she was left there by her eldest child, a bright lad of ten, after searching the house thoroughly, had at length out door, in quest of a mamma to wanto while repeating his evening prayers. The ings of her child recalled her scattered senses, e went in. She heard the petitions of her s; she placed them in their low beds;

their cheeks warm with holy kisses; breathed over them those fervent prayers which gush, almost unbidden, from the maternal heart, when a child has nestled there; then went down, and wandered from one window to another, in hopes, fast as the darkness was coming on, to obtain some glimpse of the expected husband.

He had left home the day before, to visit a town some twenty miles distant. Nothing but urgent business would have induced him to go at that time, as he had barely recovered from severe illness. His wife had expected his return early in the afternoon, and now feared the worst, from his probable exposure, when so weak and fatigued, to the inclemency of the storm.

The hours passed on. The clock struck ten. Faint and sick with deferred hope, Mrs. Owen left the window, and, sinking upon a sofa, buried her face in its cushions, and wept.

Suddenly the front door was swung back hastily. She hurried to the hall, and in the muffled form that enters recognized her husband. But what bears he in his arms? It seems — it is a human form.

"Summon help," he cries to his wife, as, depositing his burden in the place she had just left, he sunk into a chair, trembling with exhaustion.

"Never mind me," continued he, as she strove to loosen and take off his cold garments; "see to her

first, if, indeed, it be not too late to render her any help."

"It 's a poor, half-dead creature I dragged out of a snow-drift some three miles from here," said he, in answer to the interrogative looks of the servants. "Do what you can quickly, or it will be of no avail. She groaned as I lifted her to the carriage. There has been no sign of life since."

Upon removing the large travelling-cloak which Owen had wrapped around the perishing stranger, the form of a woman was visible. She was emaciated almost to a skeleton, with a face haggard and pallid, hands stiff and locked as in a spasm, limbs cold and rigid, a scanty supply of tattered cotton garments their only covering.

Corpse-like enough she appeared. Indeed, it flashed over the mind of the elder woman that it was some dead vagrant, who had been left on the highway, as not worthy a Christian grave. Yet, with the experience of a skilful nurse, she busied herself in striving to restore animation.

She was successful. After some two or three hours' unremitting attention, the poor creature, alive in body, but unconscious in mind, was borne to a comfortable chamber, and watched as carefully as though she had been an old and dear inmate.

Then, and not till then, would Owen allow his wife to devote her care to him. And then he explained how he had chanced to discover the freezing woman.

"She owes her life to our good dog," said he; "for the darkness, storm, and my hurry, would not allow me to see anything. His peculiar howl first arrested me. I was loth to stop, yet felt I must, certain he had found something. He dragged me to an angle in the rail-fence. There, crouched on the hard ground, and fast covering up with snow, I discovered a human form,— whether dead or alive I knew not, could not wait to ascertain,— but as well and fast as I could bore her to my chaise and drove on. I thank God I have rescued a mortal from death, and yet I doubt if she thanks me for it. She seems like one to whom life is a burden."

"A homeless, friendless woman!" murmured Lottie. "She is to be pitied; yes, and mourned over. Homeless, friendless!" she repeated, tears gushing to her eyes; "what a lot for a frail sister! She has sinned, deeply and darkly, no doubt; but has she not suffered, too? Poor thing! homeless, friendless, at night; when you wake, if wake you do, you will have found a home and a friend. Shall it not be so, Edward?" and she looked up to him with a face radiant, amidst its tears, with the pure beams which flash from a Christian heart.

"Even as you say, Lottie, shall it be. We can assuage her bodily pangs, if we have no skill to heal her mental ones."

Several days passed on. The stranger seemed to gain some in physical strength, but her mind had

never for a moment been cognizant of life. She spoke not, she did not seem to see. Passive as a new-born child, she suffered the attendants to do as and what they would with her.

On the tenth day she fell into a deep slumber. It lasted many hours, and the nurse predicted happy results from it. When her patient awoke she was rational, and demanded to be told where she was, and what and all they knew of her. She seemed violently agitated at the recital of her attendant, so much so that the latter forbade her speaking another word that evening.

On the morrow, as at an early hour Mrs. Owen stood at the bedside, noting the quick pulse, the stranger suddenly opened her eyes, and, fixing them intently upon the countenance of her hostess, exclaimed, in a voice tremulous with emotion, "Charlotte Earle, Charlotte Earle! is it you who tends my death-bed? God of heaven!" cried she, passionately, "why, why didst thou lead me here? I lay down in a snow-drift to die; yet I wake, from what I know not, and I am here, *in his house, she watching me!*"

"You don't know me," said she to Mrs. Owen; who, amazed at hearing her maiden name uttered by one whom she could not recognize as having ever known, was bending over her with a wondering look. "No, you do not know me, nor would your husband. Call him and see. Quickly," said she, in earnest tones; "I must speak to him before I die."

She grasped his hands as he approached the bed, and gazed at him with a long, fixed stare. "You are but little changed," cried she, at length; "so little, that I should have known you in any land. Alas!" and her voice sunk to a plaintive whisper, "sin is a hard, hard master. You and yours have as yet been barely touched by time; while I, so fair, so lovely once, am — what I am! Do you know me, Owen? No, no! you scan my face as though you had never, till to-day, glanced at it. Yet once you paid a manly homage to my beauty; your heart, for a little time, was fascinated by my wiles. You stare, you wonder! Listen to me, both of you. When a sinless girl, I knew you both; ay, and my first dark sin was the hellish one of striving to rend apart your wedded souls. *Isabel Voysez* was once my name, and *I* it was who penned those letters whose lying lines were meant to blast your loves forever. I, *I* — and yet beneath your roof I find my death-bed!"

Yes, the mystery which, for thirteen years, had involved the anonymous letters, was solved at last, and by the writer, too. Disappointed that she could not secure the rich Owen for a husband, enraged that his blinded eyes should be opened, and his homage transferred to another, in a season of moral madness she formed the base scheme of parting them, by the perpetration of fiendish lies. She said, truly, that was her first, dark sin; the first, yet it damned her

mortal bliss. From that time her course was downward, downward, far and deep, into the dark abyss of sin. True, she paused at times, and gazed back with a longing eye; but all in vain were her cries for help; no angel came to draw her back, while legions of devils urged and dragged her on. And on she went, till at length, with premature age on her wrinkled brow, premature decay in her trembling limbs, spurned from every door, a poor, homeless, friendless harlot, she sunk on the highway, and laid down to die in a snow-drift!

Her story, told by snatches, during the few weeks that remained of life, sent many a shudder through the nerves of those who listened. And yet, dark, sinful as it was, they felt, each time she spoke, how close to the judging heart should be cherished the poet's lines:

> "Then gently scan your brother man —
> Still gentler sister woman;
> Though they may gang a kennin wrang,
> To step aside is human.
>
> "Then, at the balance, let 's be mute,
> We never can adjust it:
> What 's *done* we partly may compute,
> But know not what 's *resisted!*"

THE THANKSGIVING PRESENTS.

I.

"HURRA! hurra!" shouted Hal Merton, as he rushed in from school, his cheeks glowing with exercise, and his fine eyes sparkling with anticipated joy.

"The Governor's Proclamation is out,—I read it in Sam Hayward's paper,—four weeks from to-day and we'll have Thanksgiving. Hurra for roast turkey, pumpkin-pie and plum-pudding!" and, swinging his old cap, he threw it to the ceiling, catching it with his right foot and tossing it again, in a game that was merriment to him, but death to the good looks of the only head-gear he was worth. In the midst of his glee, and while his laugh rang loudest, his eyes fell upon the pale, sad face of his fatigued mother, who was bending over the ironing-table, beside which she had stood from early dawn. Tears were streaming down her lean cheeks, and she was struggling to suppress the deep sighs that ached for utterance. Confused, the boy ceased abruptly, and, turning aside, buried his face in his hands; a crush-

ing sense of parental degradation weighing heavily on his young bosom.

In a few moments Mrs. Merton finished folding the clothes she was engaged with, and, taking down her hood and shawl, went out. As soon as she was gone, Mary, the eldest child, a pensive girl of fifteen, put down the babe she had been tending, and, wiping her eyes, went to her brother, and, throwing her arms around his neck, kissed him tenderly. He returned her caress, and then, choking down his feeling, exclaimed, "Poor, poor mother! how thoughtless I was to speak so joyfully of Thanksgiving! but I had been out at play with the boys, and they were all talking of it, and I got excited and forgot myself. No, no; there can be no Thanksgiving for the drunkard's family. Were there ever children so wretched as we?"

"Hush, Hal! don't talk so," said Mary, in a sweet, plaintive tone; "we have much to be thankful for. Think what a good mother we have; father was kind and good once; indeed, he is now when—" She paused; her keen filial feelings would not permit her to finish the sentence, so full of misery to her lacerated heart.

There was silence for some moments. Hal finally broke out, in a passionate voice, "Father ought to be ashamed of himself for drinking as he does. A man so well educated, and who can support his family so comfortably, to make such a beast of himself,

and allow his wife and children to suffer so! It is too bad. I am out of patience with him."

The hand of his sister was placed upon his lips. "My brother is angry; he forgets of whom he is talking."

"No, I did n't forget it, Mary," said the boy, in a still more vehement tone; "but, father or no father, it is a shame for him to conduct so. Just think of mother, weak and sick as she is, wearing her life out when there is no need of it, and receiving curses for her reward! Mary, though he is my father, my blood boils sometimes when I hear him speak to mother so rudely. I sometimes wish he bore no relation to me, that I might knock him down for it," and the boy's hands were clenched convulsively.

"Hal," said Mary, in a soothing voice, "for all mother suffers so much, she never complains; she bears her sorrows like a saint. Her heart is breaking with father's ways, yet she prays all the time for him. Did you ever pray for him?"

"No. I am always so mad, when I think that I've got such a drunken father, that I feel more like cursing than praying. O, Mary, it is awful to be called the brat of a drunken rascal, as I am sometimes, when the boys want to spite me."

"And yet, Hal, that is nothing to what mother endures; and think you she ever feels like cursing him?"

Hal spake not for some minutes; then he answered, frankly, "Yes, Mary, I was angry; but how can I

help it? To know that we might be happy and comfortable, and yet are so unhappy and miserable, just that father may gratify his selfish palate! How happy we used to be! Do you remember, Mary, the week before Thanksgiving, what merry times we used to have? What sights of pies and cakes mother used to bake, and what a grand dinner we had! but now, now we are not sure of a dry crust. O, if I could only do something for father. He 'll kill himself soon, if he goes on so; and then mother 'll die, and we 'll be all alone. What can I do?"

"Pray, like sister Mary," said the sweet voice of little Ellen, a child of seven years. "She taught me a little prayer to say every night and morning for poor father, and I know he won't be bad much longer. Let me say it for you;" and she fell on her knees, and, folding her hands, breathed a childish petition to God, that her father might be made a good man.

Tears were in the boy's eyes when she said amen, and better feelings were born within his bosom. He sat silent for some time, when he said to Mary:

"Do you suppose, if I should go out and try to work, I could earn enough in four weeks to buy a Thanksgiving dinner? It would make mother happy; for you know last year how bad she felt that she had nothing for us, and how father scolded about it, when it was n't her fault. How much do you suppose a turkey would cost?"

shoulder, said, pleasantly, "Are you very tired, my little man?"

"Not at all, sir," was the ready reply.

Then perhaps you'll carry this bundle to my house, and take this bright fourpence for your pay?"

Hal jumped so high when the coin touched his hand as to astonish the man; which remarking, he blushed, and, in a polite manner, said, "I will do your errand, and am obliged indeed to you," and bounded off, his heart light as his feet. This duty done, he hastened home. A sad, dreary-looking place it was. The fire was low, and there was not a piece of wood with which to replenish it. Mary sat on a low stool, close to the few embers, with the babe on her lap, her apron drawn close over its purple arms, while around her were gathered the other children, whom she was striving to amuse by the recital of little stories. Mrs. Merton sat beside the window, striving by the failing daylight to complete the child's dress she was busy with. Showing the fourpence to Mary, and taking his money-box, Hal ran quickly away. Proudly did he walk into a shop where hung a good row of dressed fowls. Stepping up to the owner, with whom he was well acquainted, he accosted him:

"Good evening, Mr. Goddard; I want to buy a nice turkey."

"You buy a turkey?" was the answer, in a sort of incredulous, questioning tone.

"Yes; I should like to buy one."

"Your father has got home, then, I suppose?"

"No, sir, he has not."

The man looked a little curious, and wondered, as well he might, how Hal could find means to buy a turkey, for well did he know the situation of the family. Then the happy boy took from his pocket the little box, and told how he had come by the contents. "It will buy a turkey, will it not, Mr. Goddard?" said he, not a little anxiously. The man's heart swelled, and he was forced to turn aside and wipe away the great drops that stole down his cheeks.

It was some time ere he could master his emotions sufficiently to answer Hal.

"How large a turkey would you like?" said he, at length.

"As large as my money will buy, sir. We don't very often have good things now, and we shall all be pretty hungry."

Mr. Goddard took down a fine turkey and weighed it. It was a little over ten pounds. He had paid, that morning, a dollar for it, and could readily sell it for twelve or fourteen cents a pound. But, what matters it, said he, if I don't make a cent on it, my heart will be the richer; and he handed it to the boy, who, with sparkling eyes, paid down his hard-earned money. It was a much finer one than he had anticipated receiving, and happy was his heart as he turned to go.

"See here, Hal! when you've carried that home, come back, and you shall have a nice pumpkin pie to set beside it."

"A dollar, at least. They are always high at that time, you know."

"A dollar! I don't believe I can earn a dollar, but I'll try;" and his young eyes brightened; "yes, I'll try; but don't say a word to mother about it. If I do get it, I want it should be a surprise."

The promise given, he ran off, full of his project. An hour afterward he returned, and gave his sister two cents. "It's only a little," said he, "but it's a beginning; ninety-eight cents more, and we'll have the turkey."

Carefully was the copper treasure hid away, and with a light heart the boy bounded about doing his evening chores. The frugal supper was prepared and eaten. The little ones were undressed and put to bed, and Mrs. Merton and Mary drew up close to the feeble light of a cheap candle and plied their needles, while Hal sat on a stool by the little fire, dreaming of those ninety-eight cents yet to be earned. When the clock struck nine, their mother advised both to retire. Hal obeyed instantly, for he had been yearning to get up stairs and take a peep at the precious two cents. But Mary, though her arms ached,—for, being one of her mother's busy days, she had done all the housework, beside tending the babe,—pleaded to stay up and finish the shirt she was making; and for a full hour later she sowed, till the last button-hole was made, and the last button on, when, with a satisfied look, she rolled it up, saying,

in her pleasant voice, "There is twenty-five cents earned, mother." The work on that shirt and the words of that poor girl,— what a commentary on cheap furnishing stores!

As the time wore on after Mary had left her, and the hand of the clock pointed towards eleven, Mrs. Merton became very restless. She would every few minutes drop her work and turn her face to the door, in the attitude of listening. At length a footstep was heard upon the pavement, a familiar one. She waited a moment, then, exclaiming, in a tone of thankfulness, "He is sober!" she threw on an additional piece of wood and stirred the fire till it blazed a pleasant welcome for the late-returning husband. He entered, and addressed her kindly. It was the first time he had done so for weeks; and the warm tears rushed to her eyes; her heart beat almost to suffocation. Habitual self-schooling assisted her in controlling her feelings, and she answered calmly and pleasantly. A half hour's conversation followed, when, after preparing him a cup of tea and a piece of toast, they retired. On the face of the wife, who, weary with the severe labor of her toilsome lot, soon fell asleep, was an expression more pleasant than had rested there for many a month. A few kind words from a sober husband had revived the faint hopes slumbering in her bosom, and the dream-child, with rose-colored pinions, hovered sweetly above her pillow.

But her companion tossed, in vain attempts to woo

sleep, until the early dawn was lighting up the east. Unhappy man! the curse of strong drink was on him. His home, once as near a paradise as earthly homes can be, had been by his own hands transformed into a hell. Sixteen years before, he had been wedded to the beautiful Mary Osborne. The pet bird of a lovely flock, he had taken her from the home-cage, to sing for himself alone. A calm and happy life was theirs during twelve years. Children gathered around their fireside, adding golden links to the bright chain love had woven about their hearts. But the tempter came, and slowly, insidiously, yet surely, did his fell work. For two years, the change in Mr. Merton's habits was imperceptible to every one but his wife. She knew it, felt it with a pang that almost sent the thrill of despair through her aching heart. Sad, sad is that time, when the wife first learns to doubt the dear one in whom she has been wont to place implicit confidence. Earth hath not another trial so severe. It is the awful travail of the soul, by which is born sorrow so terrible as to be worse than madness. Dreadful was the ordeal through which Mrs. Merton passed. At times, it seemed to her the life-strings would snap asunder, as though she could cut them with her own hand. But nobly and well did she struggle with herself and her fate. She looked into the faces of her little ones, listened to the wail of the babe on her breast, and determined to live for them.

The last two years of her life had been a constant

succession of miseries. No longer could her husband's conduct be concealed from the world; and at home his usually kind manner had changed to a moroseness that was fatal to every latent hope of happiness. Want, too, was added to their discomforts. He was a mechanic, and could always command the highest wages. So excellent was his work, despite his habits, every sober day found him with plenty of opportunities to labor and be well paid. But his earnings were nearly all consumed by the raging thirst within him, so that on his wife devolved nearly the entire support of the family. But she labored cheerfully, and never was the shade of discontent upon her brow. As Mary had said, she bore all like a saint. Until the last nine months, she had been able, by severe exertions, to keep her family from feeling the keen wants of nature. But their destitution at the birth of her last child had obliged her to leave her bed and seek employment, long ere her exhausted physical situation had regained its strength, and an illness succeeded, so severe as almost to carry her into the arms of death. Without a murmur would she have gone, had not the little suffering family looked into her eyes so pleadingly. For them she prayed to live, and, her petition granted, after many weeks she rose from her couch to take up again the heavy cross of providing for the necessities of six children, besides bearing all the additional evils that fall to the lot of the drunkard's wife.

Upon Mary seemed to rest all the virtues of both

parents. She was a noble girl, and, though young in years, had the judgment of maturity. Without her, life seemed insupportable to her mother. The whole charge of the family was cheerfully taken by the young daughter, and every leisure moment, beside many stolen from needed rest, was given to the needle, to assist in providing food and clothing. For many weeks the father had contributed not a shilling to their support; and destitute indeed was their condition on that last day of October, just four weeks before the appointed Thanksgiving.

II.

Very early on the following day Mary was up, though it was a cold, dreary morning. So low was their fuel, that she did all the necessary cleaning about the single room they occupied in the day, and even sewed for some time, before she kindled the fire. Then, lighting one and preparing their scanty meal, — scanty indeed, — roasted potatoes and salt for the children, and weak tea and butterless toast for the parents, she proceeded to awaken and dress the younger children, all the while going on tiptoe, lest she should disturb her mother, who, to her great joy, slept much later than usual. When all was ready, she summoned her parents, and rejoiced to find her father in a gentle mood.

When breakfast had been finished, Mrs. Merton took her sewing out and sat down by the window.

Little Ellen fondled the babe, while Mary washed and put away the dishes. Mr. Merton drew up by the fire, and sat for some time with his face buried in his hands. At length, rising, he went up stairs, and, bringing down an old valise, placed it upon the table; then, opening the bureau drawer, he began taking out some of his clothes and packing them. Mary looked on with a troubled gaze, while Mrs. Merton's heart sank within her. Again did her hopes faint; so crushed was she by the transition, that for some time she had not power to move. But the turning of the key in the valise aroused her numbed faculties, and, springing up, she placed her hands in her husband's, and, with tearful eyes and quivering lips, asked where he was going.

"About thirty miles from here, to work," was the answer.

Well might the poor wife tremble. Once before he had packed that valise and gone away to work, and fresh was the remembrance of the beastly condition in which he was brought home to her. She fell on her knees before him, and besought him not to go. *She* would work, would do all, everything, if he would but stay with them. He did not kick her from him, as he had done at times before when she had there kneeled; but, raising her from the floor, and seating her, he said, in a firm voice, "I must go, Mary!" Without another word he opened the door. Ellen ran after him quite into the street, to ask how long he would stay. "I will try and be at home by

Thanksgiving," was the answer; and, hurrying his steps, he was soon out of sight. The shock was so severe to Mrs. Merton, she was forced to lay aside her work, and recline upon the bed for many hours. Not until night did her physical frame recover strength enough to permit her to resume her sewing; and then it was with such a tremulous hand as told too well with what agony the nerves were quivering. Hal's was the only smiling face that evening. But he had that day received a bright dime from a generous traveller; and the thought that one-eighth of the precious money for the purchase of the turkey was earned, could not but cause a few pulsations of joy to beat in his young bosom.

Slowly and sadly wore off the days that intervened between Mr. Merton's departure and Thanksgiving. Many were the privations to which his family were subjected. The weather was severe for the season, and so much of the mother's earnings were required to purchase fuel, as to leave only a very little for food. The coarsest kind only was procured; and sometimes one meal a day was all their scant larder would allow. Still, no murmurs were heard, but the voice of praise and prayer went up oftener from that humble house than from many a mansion that want had never frowned upon.

But time, though sorrow seems to make it long, still ever has its end; and, at length, the day before Thanksgiving arrived. Hal arose with a troubled heart. In spite of all his efforts, there were still ten

cents to be earned, ere he could procure his turkey. He might have then counted it all. But, one evening, so destitute were they, that they were obliged to go supperless; and the boy, hearing the cries of the little ones for food, and marking the faint appearance of his mother and sister, took from his little hoard a precious ninepence, and, buying some Indian meal and milk, carried it home to them, whispering to Mary, as he came in, "I'll trust to Providence to replace it, for my present." Had it not been for that generous deed, he would have had the requisite sum and two cents over; but he asked himself, as, before going to school one morning, he counted it over, would he have been so happy as he was, when, after telling his mother it was money honestly gained, she kissed him so tenderly and called him her noble boy, and the little ones hung about him, thanking him for their supper? His heart answered, No. Still, he felt anxious about securing the remainder of the sum, and right glad was he to learn from the teacher there would be no session of the school that day. With so many hours before him, he hoped to earn it. He spent the whole morning in search of work; would and did go two miles and back for a single cent; yet, with all his exertion, when noon came he had earned but four cents. The afternoon hours wore on, the town clock struck four, and yet the six cents were wanting. With a depressed heart, Hal was turning from the market to go home, when an old employer of his father, laying his hand upon his

The boy almost doubted his ears. Was it true? A feast they would certainly have, and, running home, he entered by the back way, and hid the turkey in a barrel, till he could go for the market-man's present.

He, meanwhile, had run over to his dwelling and related to his wife the circumstances.

"You can spare him a pie, can you not?"

"Of course I can," said she. "Sorry indeed should I be to have so fine a family as the Mertons go without a taste of pumpkin pie on Thanksgiving." She brought one and set it on the table. Looking at it a moment, she added another. "There are a good many of them, over there," said she, appealing to her husband, "and it an't often they have good things;" and she placed beside the pies a large pound-cake, handsomely frosted.

"I've got a plenty of them, and we shan't be a cent the poorer in the end, and they'll be a great deal happier; so, just take the cake and pies over to him. She is a good woman — poor Mrs. Merton,— that she is; and it's a shame she has n't got a better husband."

Hal really doubted his eyes when Mr. Goddard showed him the presents. Grasping his hands, he wet them plenteously with his tears. "I cannot thank you as I want to, but, indeed, I am very grateful."

"Never mind thanks, my boy; but run home with them."

Swiftly did Hal obey, first with the pies, and then with the tempting cake. Placing them on a small table in the pantry, he entered the room, striving to look unconcerned, though his heart beat so he could almost hear it.

It was but a few moments ere his mother rose to get a cup of water for one of the little ones, when her scream of surprise, as she opened the door, more than thrice repaid her boy for all his labors. She could not understand it, and looked wonderingly from Hal to Mary. The latter explained the phenomenon of the turkey, and then the former related the generosity of the market-man and his wife. Mrs. Merton could not speak, but withdrew into another room, to give vent to her full heart in tears of gratitude for the blessings God had left her in her children, and for the kind feelings which yet beautify human nature.

She was calm when she returned, and, taking down her hood and shawl, said, in a sweet voice,

"Now that we have a turkey, we must have some fire to cook it; I must go with my work to Mrs. Trull's."

The children's hearts were troubled a little. Mrs. Trull was a hard woman to work for; so every one said whom necessity compelled to labor in her service. She always beat down the wages, and, even then, was loth to pay them.

"If mother should not get her pay!" said Hal, in a doubtful tone.

"O, I guess, that is, I hope, she will," replied Mary, striving to speak encouragingly. "Mrs. Trull was so particular about telling mother to get it done to-night, that I am very sure she will get the money."

III.

Mrs. Merton ascended the marble steps of the palace-home, herself quite confident of being paid on presenting her bill. She rang, and in answer to her summons the servant who appeared said Mrs. Trull was very busy and could see no one.

"But I must see her," said Mrs. Merton; "I have some work she gave me particular orders to bring to-night."

"Give it to me, then," answered the girl, in an impudent tone, "and I'll take it to her."

"I must see the lady myself," was the reply, in a firm voice.

The servant went off muttering, and presently returned, telling her to go up stairs. She went, and found the lady, half-buried in the voluptuous depths of her rocking-chair. Upon a rich cushion beside her reposed a lap-dog; and she *was* busy, very, indeed, in fondling the beautiful pet!

"You wished to see me," said the lady, in a languid tone, only half raising her head, and without bidding the tired woman sit down.

"I have brought home the child's dress you gave

me to make. You wanted it, I believe, this evening."

"Yes, very much. Little Fred must have a new dress for Thanksgiving. Let me see it."

It was handed her. Carefully was every seam, and every turn in the embroidery, inspected. It was finally pronounced perfect, and then carefully thrown upon the floor, and the dog-caressing resumed. Not a word was said about the pay, and, like all delicate minds, Mrs. Merton shrank from asking for it. At length the lady looked up.

"Ah!" said she, "I thought you had gone. Do you want any more work?"

"Not this evening, ma'am; but—" She waited, thinking the lady would speak; but she did not, and the thought of her cold hearthstone gave her courage, and she resumed:

"If convenient, I should be very grateful if you would pay me for making the dress."

"You must call day after to-morrow. I have n't a cent of change."

"But my children will freeze before that time. I need the money very much." There was a touching pathos in the poor mother's voice.

"I have told you when you could have it," answered the lady, with some asperity. Mrs. Merton felt it was useless to contend with fate, when fate is in the hands of a heartless or thoughtless woman of fashion.

A single glance at her countenance, as she en-

tered her home, revealed to the children how illusive had been their hopes. They said nothing, however. For some time they sat around the little bed of ashes, each busied in their own thoughts, and sad, desolate ones they were. It grew, at length, so cold, that the mother bid them rise and run about to keep warm. Hal started up at that moment.

"I've just thought of something, mother. I'll go down where they are building the new boat. I saw a whole lot of large, thick chips there, this morning, and the men said any one might have them who would carry them away. I'll take a basket and get some. They'll keep us from freezing, if they won't cook our dinner;" and off he ran.

He had scarcely been gone two minutes, ere he rushed into the room almost out of breath, so eager to tell his news.

"Mother, mother, what does it mean? There is a man at the door with a load of wood, all sawed and split,—and he says he was ordered to leave it at the house of Mrs. Henry Merton, 15 Green-street. Do you suppose it is ours?"

"I am sure I can't tell," answered the mother, half-bewildered, as she stepped out to see.

"Is n't there some mistake?" said she, her limbs trembling lest it should be so.

"No, ma'am, I guess not. This is 15, and your name is Mrs. Merton, ain't it?"

"Yes; but who sent it?"

"I don't know. I always carry the loads where

I'm told to, and don't ask any questions; that's the way I was brought up. But come, show me where your back gate is, that I can unload, for it's getting late."

Hal pointed the way, and ran through to assist in bringing it in, but cried out to his mother, who was just closing the front door:

"There is something in the doorway, mother, I can't get out; bring a light, quick."

Mary had just lighted the small end of a candle, and, with her parent, ran to see what was the matter. How great was their surprise at the sight. The obstacle was a barrel of flour. Upon it lay a fine turkey and a half-dozen chickens; beside it, two huge pumpkins, a bushel-basket full of potatoes, and a covered basket, which, when opened, was found to contain tea, sugar, coffee, lard, eggs, butter, candles, and various little packages of condiments; not a great quantity of any, to be sure, but sufficient to make a merry Thanksgiving for the poor family.

Hal swung his old cap, and huzzaed so loudly as to make the next door neighbor wonder what they were about at the Mertons'. The mother and Mary spoke not, but tears trembled in their eyes, and their bosoms heaved.

A bright fire was soon kindled, and, after its genial warmth and light had diffused themselves over the cold room sufficiently long to warm, thoroughly, the benumbed inmates, Mrs. Merton drew them around her, and knelt down, returning thanks to

the Father above for all his mercies, and especially for their sudden relief from starvation and cold. She prayed as only a mother thus situated could pray; then, in a tremulous tone, went up an earnest petition for the absent, the erring one. Not a word had they heard of him since he left, and her voice was broken, as her fears, her hopes, her wishes, were presented to her God. As she uttered the last word, a deep, manly voice responded "Amen;" and, starting as though the magic wire had thrilled their nerves, they beheld, leaning against the door, that husband, that father, in whose behalf Heaven had just been implored.

In a moment the happy man seemed very much in danger of being suffocated with caresses. His wife's arms were about his neck; Mary was kissing one hand, and Hal the other; while the little ones clung to his knees, and even the babe crept to him, and placed a tiny hand on the muddy boot. When, at length, they released him, with what pride and pleasure did they gaze on him; and well might they, for he was a noble-looking man, as he stood there, so evidently himself again. Their cup seemed full. Drawing near the fire, he inquired kindly after all, and asked, with some anxiety, how they had got along alone. Mrs. Merton looked at Mary as though she wished her to speak, and the young daughter, in a manner peculiar to herself, related the month's experience. As she ended, Hal clapped

his hands on his knees, and, looking up to his father exclaimed:

"Sha'n't we have grand times to-morrow?"

"I guess we shall; but, while listening to the story of all your presents, I had almost forgotten mine."

"Did you, really, bring us a present, father?" said little Ellen, pressing his palms; "then I know—" She stopped, blushing and confounded.

"Then you know I have n't been drunk, Ellen. No; and, with God's help, Hal shall not, very soon, be called the brat of a drunken rascal." His voice was husky. He left the room, returning in a few moments, however, and presenting his wife with something that seemed to the children like a small scroll in a gilt frame. At a glance, Mrs. Merton comprehended it, and, giving it to Mary, escaped to the bedroom, to give vent to her emotions. Surely might she weep with joy, surely might Mary murmur, "God bless you, father," and Hal shout, and little Ellen dance,—the present was a pledge of total abstinence, signed HENRY MERTON.

After the lapse of some minutes, the father turned to Mary:

"I have eaten nothing since morning, and have rode thirty miles, and walked around in the city considerable; can't you give me some supper? I wonder if mother could n't bake some of her nice short cakes, if I should open that barrel of flour." Nothing in the room escaped Mrs. Merton's ear, and,

as soon as the last sentence was uttered, she rose from the bed, and, bathing her eyes a few moments, came out. She did not look at her husband, but he did at her, and felt that all his struggles were repaid a thousand-fold.

Then was there a merry time in that apartment. Hal brought in more wood, and ran for fresh water, and filled the tea-kettle and an iron pot, and hung them over the blazing fire; Ellen prepared some potatoes and put them to boil; Mary wiped the grid-iron, and, drawing out a fine bed of coals, set it upon them, and had soon a couple of fowls nicely broiling; Mrs. Merton brought out the tin oven, and had some light cakes rising and browning; while father, now dandling the babe, and then tossing Fred and George, was in everybody's way, and yet just where everybody wanted him.

When the meal was prepared and placed upon the neatly-arranged table, a happier circle never gathered around the festive board. All were hungry, and all ate heartily; no; not all, Mrs. Merton could scarcely swallow a mouthful. She had been faint, and longing for food all day, but her soul had now quaffed so deep a draught of joy, that temporal wants were all forgotten.

Late, almost midnight was it, ere the children could be persuaded to retire. When they were gone, and the mother's foot had ceased to stir the cradle, Mr. Merton, softly drawing his chair close to his wife,

took her hands, and, looking into her eyes, asked, in a deep, anxious voice:

"Dare I hope my Mary will forgive the erring one, will bless me with the kiss of love?"

Mary was speechless; but she pointed to the pledge that hung above the fire-place, then looked upon him with such an earnest, thrilling glance, the love-light quivering so beautifully in her flooded eyes, that he *felt* all was forgiven, forgotten. He clasped her to his bosom, in a passion of joy, kissing her brow, cheeks, lips, as though she were the bride of an hour. And she,— her very soul was bathing in Elysian dreams; heaven seemed her home, an angel's breast her pillow.

PRIDE AND PITY.

PRIDE AND PITY.

I.

"THAT is he," exclaimed Ellen Lee, in a joyous tone, as the street door was gently opened and closed. "How glad I am he has come at last; I thought it would never be two o'clock;" and, rising hastily, she shook an apron-full of gorgeous worsted upon the carpet, tossed her thimble in the midst of them, and was down stairs ere he, whom she had been impatiently expecting, had laid aside his overcoat.

"O, father, father!" cried she, grasping the hands of a fine-looking man, and gazing earnestly at him. "I am *so* glad you 've come. Do you know I have been watching at the window a whole hour for you? Pray, why did you stay so long?"

"So long, Ellen! why, it 's not late; the clock is only now striking."

"Well, it has seemed an *age* since noon."

"Two hours an age! O, the extravagance of these young girls;" and the parent, half-reprovingly, half-jestingly, placed his fingers upon her lips.

"Now don't, father, pray don't use that word;

you know two hours does seem a long while when one is waiting for them to pass. So now lay aside that frown, for it was only because I wanted to see you so much, *so very much*, that the hours dragged so."

"But why want to see me so very much?" answered he, as he suffered her to lead him into the parlor and seat him in his easy-chair.

Then the daughter, nestling at his feet, on a low stool, and resting her head on his knee, as she was wont to do when a little child, looked wistfully into his face, parted her lips as to speak, and then turned aside her countenance, as though she were half-afraid to utter her wishes.

"You 're strangely timid, Ellen. What is it you want so very much, and yet dare not ask me for? Come, let me hear it quickly; for, if my appetite deceive me not, the dinner-bell will ring ere long. I never refuse you anything reasonable, do I?"

"O, no, no; and that—" She hesitated.

"Then you want something unreasonable, do you? —another silk dress, ere the last has been worn a half-dozen times, or—"

"A new dress!" and the lip curled. "No, indeed. But, father, which is the wealthiest, you or Mr. Grey?"

"What are you trying to come at, Ellen?"

"Don't you think you are as rich as he?"

"Why yes, I guess I am. But why ask me such

a question? You and Julia have not been quarrelling about your probable dowries?"

"Julia and I quarrelling! why, father, but you jest. I'll tell you, now, why I've wanted to see you so much. Mr. Grey returned last evening from Boston, and he has brought Julia an elegant gold watch and chain. But she is not to wear them yet, as he intended them for a New Year's present; and she only told me of it, because she wanted me to have one just like it, as we have always dressed very nearly alike—"

"You need n't continue, Ellen; I can easily guess the remainder of your story. It is only this; you want your dear father to be as generous as Mr. Grey, and give you a watch and chain for the New Year. Is it not so, daughter?" and he playfully patted her flushed cheeks. "But let me see, are you old enough to wear a watch?"

"Old enough!" repeated the young girl, in a tone of surprise, and, rising, she drew up her graceful form to its extreme height. "Why, father, I was eighteen last month; why, I shall soon be—"

"Old as the hills, sha' n't you, Ellen?" said the good-natured parent. "But come, there is the bell; we will talk of this at dinner."

At the table, Mrs. Lee had so much to say to her husband about some preparations for the approaching holidays, that Ellen could not, without obtruding, speak a word of the costly gift, and could only wish, in secret, that the viands were despatched, and she

again at her father's feet. But, alas for her! just as they were entering the parlor, he was summoned in haste to his counting-room, "on important business."

"Business, business, how I hate the word!" muttered Ellen, as she proceeded to her chamber. "It's always business with men just when their wives and daughters want them most. I wish—" But she checked herself, good sense whispering to her, if it were not for that business, what would become of those wives and daughters. "But, after all," said she to herself, when she had again found her thimble and commenced reärranging her worsted, "it was provoking that he should be called away so soon, when it will be so long before he will be in again. Let me see what time it is," and she glanced at the clock on the mantel; "half-past three; four, five, six, seven; three hours and a half; father may laugh or frown, they will certainly seem an age."

If it did not seem an age, it really did a very long afternoon to that excited and impatient young creature.

"You will give them to me for a New Year's present, won't you, father?" said Ellen, when she again found herself beside her parent. "Now don't,"—playfully covering his mouth as he was about to speak,—"don't, this time, have a long string of preliminaries. Say yes, at once."

He shook his head.

"Well, then, begin. What is the first thing to be considered?"

"How much will it cost, Ellen? a hundred dollars?"

"A hundred dollars, father! Why, you don't suppose you could buy a handsome watch and chain for a hundred dollars! Why, Julia's cost two hundred and fifty."

"Two hundred and fifty! Bless me; that is twice as much as I had laid aside to purchase New Year presents for all of you. I think you are growing modest, Ellen. What is the style of Julia's present?"

"O, it is beautiful, exquisitely so!" and then she went on with a long and minute account of it, concluding with, "Mr. Grey says he don't think there is one in the city like it, and there was only one more just like it where he purchased Julia's; so, father, I want you to decide soon about it, so that we can send for it, if we cannot find one here."

"Yes, yes," answered the father, musingly; "but, Ellen, if I give you the watch and chain, I shall very soon have to give you a new breast-pin, and some new bracelets; for, as the man said in the story, the watch and chain will kill them."

"O, no, indeed; I would not exchange these for any in the town. They are as beautiful as I shall ever want."

"But of what use will this present be?"

"What use? Why, father, a great deal more use

than my pin and bracelets. Indeed, I always thought I should like a watch, for the very reason that it combines utility with ornament."

"Utility! yes, it will be very useful to you, as we have only five clocks in the house."

"But when I am out, father."

"Were you deaf, its utility might come in play then; but as it is, the town clocks acquaint us of the hours. And then, if it is only for the utility of the thing you desire it, why, you can have a good silver one for—"

"A silver watch on a young lady in these days! why, father, how it would look!"

"Look! ah, yes; I suspect look has a little more to do in the case than utility; and see here, Ellen, if I give you this watch for a New Year present, I ought, in justice, to purchase for your mother those elegant silver pitchers which she has so much admired, and buy Harry the pony he has coveted so long, and George that mocking-bird in the gilt cage. It would look rather partial in me, and, I am sure, would make you feel unpleasantly, to show to your friends a gift valued at two hundred and fifty dollars, while your mother and brothers could only exhibit those which cost five or ten dollars. Have you thought of this, Elly? You are not wont to be selfish."

"But, father, you are rich enough to buy the pitchers, pony, bird and all, even though you should give me a watch and chain. If I thought that you

could only gratify my wishes at the expense of mother and brothers, I should despise myself for asking it of you. But I know you need not do so; so come, be a generous Santa Claus this time."

"Is there nothing else you can think of for a New Year gift?"

"No; if I can't have these I don't want anything," said she, rather pettishly.

"Two hundred and fifty dollars will buy a great many things; a good many barrels of flour, and cords of wood—"

"Why, father, you talk as though you were poor. You don't expect we'll have to use any the less bread or fuel the coming year, if I have a watch?"

"O, no; I was not thinking of ourselves, Ellen, I was thinking of the poor. Such a sum would be a fortune to many a family in this city. How many, many comforts it would produce; how much sorrow and suffering it would relieve."

The young girl bent her head, and was silent some time. There was a struggle going on in her heart; pride and pity were at war. Which shall conquer?

Upon the lapse of some moments, she spoke: "But, father, were you to give to the poor not only the money which I ask you to expend for me, but even the value of the pitchers, pony and bird, it would go but a very little way towards relieving poverty, even in our own city. The mass would be as poorly off as ever."

"That may be; but the reflection that I had made two or three, or even only one family comfortable and glad, would add not a little to the pleasant memories, to the substantial happiness of my life. And then, though it would be but a mite, if every one who is blessed as we are were to do the same, there would soon be but little misery left. Never refuse to do good because you can do but a little. Atoms make the world."

There was silence.

When Ellen spoke, it was in a subdued voice; "I wish I had not set my heart so upon having a watch and chain, but it seems —" and her lips trembled.

"As though it would break if you did not have them."

"O, no, not quite so bad as that, father," and she tried to smile; "but I should feel very, very much disappointed."

"And you really think the possession of the coveted object would make you a great deal happier?"

"O, yes, a thousand —" She paused, fancying she felt the fingers on her lips.

"But why would they make you so much happier, Ellen? Come, tell me that, and mayhap, if my purse is long enough, you can show as splendid a gift as Julia."

"Why — why — you see — you know, father," began the daughter, and then she stopped. "I hardly know why," said she, at length, "but I feel that they would!"

"Well, if you cannot tell me why you would be happier with them, perhaps you *can* tell me why you would be sad without them. Would you have thought of such a present if Julia had not received one?"

She did not answer.

"Come, now, be frank. Would not the greater part of your sorrow arise from the fear that Julia would eclipse you? And would not the pleasure arise more from a feeling of gratified vanity than anything else?"

Still she made no reply; she did not even look into his face. She thought there must be a frown upon his brow; for she knew that few things were more despicable in his eyes than the desire of making a show, or having certain things merely because others did.

"Am I not right, daughter?" said he, very gently. "You would not like to have folks wonder why Ellen Lee's father did not make her as costly a present as Mr. Grey did his. You would not like to show your young beaux, on New Year's day, a less expensive present than hers."

"Do not go on, father, pray don't; I see I am very foolish—almost wicked; but I am so young."

"Young! I thought you were old, just now, Ellen. But we have moralized long enough here; I'll warrant the tea is stone cold. A word in your ear, for I see mother is watching us very closely, to see how our talk terminates; not, I suspect, without some

selfish thought." He bent forward his head, and whispered something to her, when he again continued, audibly, "And now, daughter, for a kiss and our tea."

"A dozen, a dozen kisses, father!" cried the young creature, in a tone of ecstasy, half-smothering him with passionate embraces; forgetting all the significant reproofs she had just received, in the excitement begotten by the hope of soon gratified wishes.

"O, I am so happy now, so very happy!" and she sank upon a sofa, buried her head in its cushions, and dreamed away the evening hours in golden fancies, seeming — even her father said so — to be imbued with the very spirit of happiness.

The illusion lasted till she had sought her chamber, and laid her head upon her pillow. But as her heart prepared to commune with holy things, she realized that it was excitement, not happiness, which thrilled her. She could not conceal from herself the truth, that she had desired the watch and chain, not half so much as a gift to be treasured in after years as coming from a father's hand, as to gratify a feeling of vanity; and she felt the surmise was too true, that the pain of disappointment would arise chiefly from the mortification of being outdone by a companion. She began to wonder, too, what her father would have given her for a present if she had not teased him for this one, acknowledging it would have been much better to have received a

free-will offering, than what she feared he would now give against his judgment. He was always generous to his family; never gave them a mean present; and had even said to her that he had appropriated over a hundred dollars for their New Year gifts. "But now; why, how much these holidays will cost him," said she, and began to calculate; but ceased when she had added the price of the watch and pitchers, and mused again. "But then, he's rich enough," murmured she, after a while, and, stifling her conscience, closed her eyes and tried to slumber. But the words of her father, "*I was thinking of the poor*," would recur to her mind. She knew him to be very charitable; and she knew, also, that if he were rich, his position brought with it many and heavy expenses. Besides, there was a limit to his wealth, for he was very far from being a millionaire. Perhaps, if he made *his* family such expensive New Year gifts, many *poor* families would suffer, who otherwise would have received aid from his purse.

She had a kind, noble heart, and though vanity might reign in it for a time, with calm thought its crown would ever tremble. It was long ere she slept that night; and when at length she did, gold watches and ragged children, brilliant chains and pale-faced men and women, were blended in strange confusion.

II.

Ellen seemed a different being the next morning, when she entered the breakfast-room, so quiet and subdued was she in manner. When her father remarked, as he rose from the table, that he should be at her disposal that evening, for a voyage of discovery among the jewelry stores of the town, instead of half-devouring him with kisses, and then dancing a polka with the wildness of a northern maid, she answered only with a gentle smile and a "thank you, father." The change was not unobserved by him, though he made no comment.

Some three or four hours later, as Ellen stood at the parlor window, she noticed a young girl pass by several times, pause a half-moment, and go on. She was evidently a child of poverty, and it seemed even of extreme destitution. Her patched calico dress and thin cotton shawl were but feeble protection against the keen air, while the snow had completely soaked her far-worn slippers. Her hands were purple and stiff, and, as the wind swept by her, her fragile form cowered and trembled before its cold breath. At length she placed a foot upon the marble step, glanced at a card she held, and, seemingly irresolute, at last turned away. Ellen caught a glimpse of her countenance as she stood there, and was deeply moved by it,—so thin, and pale, and sad it was, bearing traces, too, of recent tears.

"I hope she will stop here," murmured Ellen;

"she seems to wish to, and yet is afraid. I've half a mind to open the door and speak with her;" but as she turned from the window for that purpose, the young girl, apparently with a great effort, ascended the steps, and pulled the bell. It was a very gentle ring, and Ellen waited the time of no domestic, but answered it herself, at once.

"Is Mrs. Lee at home?" asked the stranger, in a low, timid voice.

"She is; would you like to see her?" answered Ellen, in her sweet, pleasant way.

"I should, very much indeed, if it would not disturb her."

"I don't think she is engaged. Come with me up stairs, and I will see." And, conducting her to the sitting-room, she ushered her in, saying, very gently, "A stranger to see you, mother."

"Good morning," said Mrs. Lee, in a tone so cordial as to make the poor trembling thing feel quite at ease. "Draw a chair to the fire; it is very cold."

"Mr. Lee directed me here, ma'am. He met me at a moment when I was in great distress, and was kind enough to say I might call upon his wife, and perhaps she might furnish me with work. And O, if you can, ma'am," her tears starting, "I shall be very grateful."

"She does not beg," said Ellen, to herself; "no, but, with tears, asks only for something to do. Poor thing, so young,— not yet as old as I,— and amidst

strangers, seeking for work!" Beautiful charities began to germinate in her moved heart.

"What kind of work would you like?"

"Any plain sewing, ma'am. I am used to all kinds, and perhaps I could make a vest, if it were not too nice. I had almost learned, when mother was taken sick."

"Then you have a mother?"

"Yes, ma'am; but she has been very sick, and I am afraid —" Her voice was choked.

"What has been the matter?" inquired the lady, very gently, after the pause of some moments.

"Over exertion, ma'am. Since father lost his sight, we have had to struggle very hard to live; for I am the oldest of six. It has been all we could do, work as hard as we would, to pay our rent, and keep half-warm and half-fed: and when little Willie was taken down with the measles, we had to spend so much time with him, that we got behindhand with our rent, and mother worked night and day for a fortnight, and it was too much for her; she almost died, and I am afraid will never get well again."

"But you think her better?"

"Yes, better, ma'am; but she will never get well till she has comforts which we cannot provide her. O, if you will only give me work! Life is sad now; but should mother die"— and she wrung her thin, cold hands, and wept.

Mrs. Lee and her daughter were unable longer to restrain their deeply-touched feelings. There was

something in the expression of her countenance, and in the tones of her voice, that made them feel her tale was true, and her grief but the outpouring of a stricken heart. The entrance of a domestic, bearing a tray with luncheon, aroused the mother, and, calming her feelings, she poured a cup of tea, and, filling a plate with cold pastry, placed them before the weeping girl, inviting her as cordially as though she were an old friend to partake with them.

She glanced at the delicacies, blushed as though she wished, yet did not dare, to speak; then faltered out,

"If you would not think me very rude, I would ask if I might take them to my mother; she needs them more than I."

"O, no, no," answered Mrs. Lee, smilingly. "I should lose forever my reputation as a skilful nurse, were I to allow a sick woman to eat such things as these. But I have some very nice soup, which I prepared this morning for an invalid friend. I shall be happy to send her some of that; it is very innocent and strengthening."

"Thank you; thank you," quickly responded the girl; "I shall be very grateful."

"I will get it for you, then; meanwhile, eat your lunch. It will perhaps refresh you; you seem very tired. Ellen, I want you a moment;" when, with delicate tact, she left the timid girl to partake of the dainties, without the embarrassment of eating before strangers.

"O, mother, mother!" Ellen sobbed out, when they were alone, "do give her something. How I wish I had not spent all last quarter's allowance. If you will only lend me some money, mother."

"No, Ellen; you know that is something I never do. If my children wish to give, it must come from their private purse."

"But you won't send her away without anything, mother!"

"Certainly not. What she asked for I shall give her, and such other things as I can present without paining her. She did not beg, and were I only to give her some money, and let her go, her self-respect would be humbled."

"Ever kind and considerate. When shall I be like you?"

After giving their young visitor time to get thoroughly warmed, and to eat a comfortable meal, they returned to the room, Mrs. Lee bearing a bundle and basket, and Ellen a pair of lined rubbers.

"Here is a fine shirt, which I want very much, this week; do you think you can do it?"

"I think I can; and I will try to sew it as neatly as you can wish," answered the young girl, modestly.

"I will pay you in advance for this one," said the lady, placing a dollar and a half in the small, thin hand; "and this evening I will send you some coarser sewing, which you need not hurry with."

"But, ma'am, you do not mean to pay me all this for one shirt?"

"I do. I know it is more than the usual price, but I am very particular, indeed, quite old-maidish about my sewing, and I know that one cannot afford to do work neatly, unless properly compensated. It is my usual price. And here," continued she, as she saw how earnestly the girl strove to thank her, "in this basket I have put up a small pail of broth and a bottle of syrup, for your mother. I think they will help her; indeed, I am sure they will; they are what I always recommend to persons recovering from illness caused by exhaustion."

"I should be happy to lend my rubbers," said Ellen, as the stranger rose to go, too much overcome to speak the gratitude which glistened in her eyes. "You can return them this evening, when the work is sent. I think you will find them very comfortable."

"If I could but find words to thank you both!" said she, at last, in a broken voice. "O, it is so new to have folks kind to me! God will bless you!" and she departed.

Domestic duties called Mrs. Lee at that moment to another part of the house, leaving Ellen to her own reflections. She sat for a long time motionless, her hand upon her brow, a tear now and then stealing down her cheek. At length, murmuring at intervals, "It is an opportunity — it would buy a great many things — perhaps this blindness might be cured

— how very sad she was;" she left the room, and, gaining her chamber, threw herself on a lounge, and suffered mind and heart to revel in sweet day-dreams.

III.

Her father did not return to dinner, but sent word he was too much engaged, and requested an early tea, that he might go out with Ellen.

Scarcely were they seated at the table, when Mr. Lee remarked, "I sent a young girl here, this morning, in quest of work. Have you seen her?"

"We have," answered mother and daughter, in one voice. "Where did you find her?"

"I was in one of the clothing stores, waiting to see the proprietor, when she came in. My heart ached for her, as soon as I glanced at her, she was so ill-protected against the cold. She drew near the stove, stood a moment, then, in a very timid manner, approached the counter, and, in a plaintive voice, asked the clerk if they had any work to put out. 'No, of course not to strangers,' was the reply, in a coarse, impudent way, when he added, with a leer, 'not even to such a pretty one as you are.' The blood crimsoned her face, and her eyes filled with tears; but she silently left the shop. I followed quickly, and, overtaking her, inquired, as delicately as possible, if I could render her any assistance. 'O, sir,' said she, in a touching tone, 'if you would but

give me work.' She was too much excited for me to learn much of her story, but I gathered that she was the sole stay of a large and afflicted family. I thought, at first, to give her alms, and let her pass; but thinking female sympathy and advice might do her more service, I directed her here; and I am glad I did so, for I know two such kind hearts would devise many things a man would not think of. I think you said you saw her, Ellen?"

"I did, father." And then she gave an account of the visit, in a manner which affected them all. She knew but little of the sorrows of the poor; indeed, she had never before been in such close contact with them — never realized so vividly how much they have to endure. Her gentle heart was moved deeper than it had ever been before, and the pathos of her voice affected her father almost as much as her story. He felt that the vanity he had mourned over was, as yet, but a temporary guest; that, evil spirit as it was, it would soon be cast out by the angel of love.

As they were preparing to go out, Mrs. Lee entered with a bundle. "I intended sending this by a domestic, but, as you are going in the immediate neighborhood, I should prefer your taking it. You can easily ascertain, then, if the tale we heard was true. You have the name and number, I think, Ellen?"

"Yes, she gave it to me at the door, as she was leaving. Do call, father."

"I will; but we must hasten."

They passed rapidly from square to square, giving only causual glances at the illuminated store windows, where gifts of almost Oriental elegance dazzled the eye and tempted the purse, until they paused before the most brilliant of all — a jeweller's establishment.

"We will first look in here. They have usually the best and most costly assortment."

Like gliding at once into fairy land, seemed it to Ellen, as they entered; and like a fairy she seemed herself, as, in her sparkling beauty, she passed from one rich ornament to another, each new one seeming to outvie the last. "I am glad I knew before I entered just what I wanted," said she. "I should have been bewildered, had I come here to choose a gift. It is really intoxicating to one's eyes, to behold at once so much that is rare, and dazzling, and superb."

But, brilliant as was the display, and large as was the assortment, a watch and chain exactly corresponding to Julia's could not be found; and they continued their walk.

Turning up a cross street, a few steps brought them to one of those dark, narrow lanes, which are at once the pest and disgrace of every city.

"The sixth house from the corner, you said. This must be it, then," as they stopped before a gloomy-looking wooden tenement. "In the cellar, was it?"

"So she said;" and the young girl shuddered as they went down the rotten and yielding steps. The

street was so dark, the place so low, the neighborhood, apparently, so vile, that fear almost supplanted the feeling of charity. But her father seemed undismayed, and, opening the door without knocking, they made their way through a long, narrow hall, to where, through a chink in the plastering, glimmered a feeble light. Feeling along the wall, he at length touched a door-latch, and, gently tapping, was in a moment admitted by the same young girl they had seen in the morning.

In the kind way peculiar to him, Mr. Lee exchanged greetings with her, and said, that being out, he and his daughter had brought her the sewing his wife had promised.

"Thank you; you are very, very kind," said she, and rather timidly invited them in, and offered them seats. Rude ones they were — old wooden stools, which the plane and the paint-brush had never touched.

"What a place for human beings to exist in!" thought Ellen, as she glanced around. There was no filth, no disorder; but poverty, gaunt, threadbare poverty, stared at them with its hollow eyes, and with skeleton fingers beckoned for charity. The damp, worm-eaten floor yielded fearfully at every footstep, while the crumbling ceiling seemed ready to fall at the least unusual jar. The winter wind shrieked dismally in the narrow hall, and found its way through a thousand crevices into the room — now coming with a fierceness that threatened to ex-

tinguish the dim light, and again making it flare so wildly that the shadows seemed like a spectral host. Close to the fireside, where burned, or rather smoked, a single stick, was drawn a cot, upon whose straw layer reclined the pale and emaciated mother, covered only by one thin and tattered quilt. Beside her, slumbered a little, meagre, purple child, some three or four years old. Upon a heap of straw, in the corner, at a little distance, slept two other children, an old, worn, woollen blanket wrapped closely around them. Upon a rickety chair, almost within the chimney-place, sat the sightless father, soothing gently,— as though he were a woman,— the moans of a little one which had known but two summers. A small pine table was near the bed, upon which stood an old black bottle, the neck broken off, so as to support a cheap tallow candle. Beside it, leaned a young lad, of about ten, his head bent closely to the pages of an old, much-worn book. A few plates, a single spoon, knife, cup and saucer, with a couple of tin pans, were arranged on the shelf over the fire-place; and this was the summary of Ellen's inventory.

"These, father and mother," said the daughter, "are the kind friends to whom we are so much indebted." The mother strove to raise herself, but fell back, and could only murmur, in a faint voice, "God bless you, God bless you!" The blind father, as he took the hands which Mr. Lee and Ellen extended, wet them with his tears, and, with a choked voice, said, "These sightless eyes cannot see your faces,

but this poor, stricken heart will always keep your memories green. I would try to thank you, but sympathy and kindness are so new to us, they move us too deeply for words."

Having gained the mastery of their emotions, Mr. Lee entered into conversation with the husband, and learned his history, while Ellen, by the bedside of the mother, listened to a whispered recital of her young daughter's devotion. Their story was sad, but trite; only one tone of that voice that goes wailing through the suburbs of every town; that voice, which, stealing up from damp cellars, down from dusty garrets, out from gloomy alleys and dark courts, blends in a strain, which, low and plaintive at first, will swell and echo, till the great soul of humanity is moved to angel deeds, till love reigneth upon earth as it does in heaven.

"We have parted with all the comforts we ever had," said the father to his visitors, as he concluded his brief tale; "all, all, save that old book, my mother's Bible. Thank God! poor men's spirits may eat, and drink, and keep warm, though their bodies starve and freeze!"

Closely did Ellen cling to her father's arm, as at length, emerging from that lowly home, they found themselves again in the filthy street, which, echoing with the woes of degradation, was well calculated to terrify the heart of a timid girl.

"Let us go home," whispered she, as with quickened footsteps they passed on.

"But we have not yet finished our tour, daughter. The evening is not far advanced; had we not better continue?"

In a sobbing voice, she answered, "No, no, father, let us go home; my heart needs relief."

New Year day came with its pleasant festivities. The splendid mansion of Mr. Lee, thrown open to all his friends, presented a scene of social enjoyment, at once bewildering and beautiful. A happy new year was the music of each lip; it thrilled the chords of every heart, and sparkled in every eye. Happiest among the happy was the young daughter. She seemed, indeed, to have quaffed at the fountain, yea, and to have bathed in its pure waters. Never had her laugh rung out with merrier music; never had her glance beamed with such angel beauty; never had her voice been so delicately sweet in tone, or her hand so cordial in its grasp. There was a heaven in her young soul, and all she did or said was tinged with light from the holy fire within.

When (and it was often in the course of the day) the conversation turned upon the gifts of the holiday, Mrs. Lee exhibited a pair of superb silver pitchers; Harry expatiated on the merits of a jet black pony; George bore his friends in triumph to the gilded cage of a mocking-bird; while Ellen showed only a small basket, woven with exquisite skill, from the evergreens of the woodland, lined with the softest moss, into the handle of which was wrought, with the

white blossoms of the everlasting, the single word — charity.

"But you would not have me infer that this, beautiful as it is," said an intimate friend, as he viewed the rustic gift, "is all you received for the New Year?"

"O, no," replied Ellen, with a sweet smile; "I had a large roll of bank bills from father; but, having no use for them at present, I put them at interest."

"At interest! where, pray, and at what rate?" said her questioner, in an incredulous tone.

"That is my secret, sir; but, rest assured, it was in a bank that will never fail, and which pays interest in advance."

Her secret — would you learn it? In a pleasant upper room in one of the most comfortable tenements of a wide, airy street, on the skirts of the town, a happy family will reveal it. They will show you their neat, warm sitting-room, with its new rag carpet, and white curtains, caught up just enough to leave space for the sunbeams to quiver amidst pots of green geraniums and monthly roses. They will show you father's large easy-chair, and mother's cushioned rocker; a neat workstand; a dining-table with snowy cloth; low seats for the little ones; a lounge for the weary, and neat chairs for friends; a cooking-stove, of the most approved pattern; a time-piece, and a pair of lamps, burnished to almost silver brightness. They will take you into neat bed-rooms,

comfortably fitted up; into a pantry, where new dishes and bright tins are neatly arranged; shew you a closet, where a barrel of flour, and boxes, and bags of provisions are stored, and a coal-bin, where the black Lehigh glistens. Yes, a blind man, a pale woman, a gentle group of joyous children, with streaming eyes and tremulous lips, will tell you Ellen's secret. They pray for her in the morning; they bless her at night; they think of her ever. She came to them like an angel, with healing in its wings, a sweet minister of charity.

"Two hundred and fifty dollars will buy a great many things!"

THE CHILDREN AND THE NOVEL.

"WELL there," muttered Mrs. Lee, in a somewhat petulant tone, as she laid down her babe, "thank fortune, the last one is abed and asleep. Now for a little comfort."

Carefully drawing the blankets around the tiny form, she rested one hand for a few moments upon the gently-heaving breast, stirred the cradle with the other, singing the while a low lullaby.

Assured, from its soft breathing and quiet limbs, that it was indeed asleep, she turned from it quickly, drew her low rocker to the stand, picked up the light, and took from underneath a miscellaneous pile in her work-basket an uncut novel.

"What a beautiful title," said she, all traces of weariness vanishing with electric rapidity from her countenance. As her eyes glanced over its pages, the dull look they had worn all day disappeared, and the light of anticipated joy flashed in its stead.

"I know I shall be pleased with it; I feel that it will be interesting," continued she. "What charming names the author has chosen. None of your common Johns and Hannahs, your Roberts and Margarets; O, no! here is noble Rodrigo, poetic Clar-

ence, sweet Florilla, pretty Lillia, saintly Therese; why, there is not an ordinary name in the book. The writer must be one of unusual taste!"

Having hastily cut the leaves, she shaded her brow with one hand, grasped the charmed book with the other, as though it were polished gold, and she a miser, and commenced, in the phrase of enthusiastic novel-readers, to devour the pages.

Rapidly did her eyes run over the first chapter. But then, she turned her head with a quick, impatient movement. Did she not hear a rustle in the cradle? Yes, a little hand was lifted from beneath the cover.

"Too bad, too bad; he'll be awake all the evening now;" and she glided with a noiseless step to the child's side.

But the eyelids were still closed; the measured breath of slumber stole gently from the half-parted lips, and the offending hand rested in quiet beauty upon the soft cheek.

It was a fair, sweet babe, whose little heart had throbbed but one short summer. As it lay there, the spell of sinless sleep upon its brow, it seemed the type of all things pure and blest. Eden, with all its loveliness, never charmed the gaze of Eve with such a beauteous picture. The holier feelings of the mother's breast were touched, as by a hand from Heaven. The angel began to trouble the deep waters of her soul, as she stood beside that cradle-bed; and when, after a vigil of several moments,

the child still sleeping, she bent her head, and imprinted upon its lips the kiss of love, the healing wave flowed for an instant, then ebbed, for the novel was not yet read.

Resuming her seat, Mrs. Lee again took her book. But the fiction seemed to have lost some of its fascination. For some time her glance vacillated between its finely-printed pages and her heaped-up basket. She even put on her thimble and threaded a needle. But a moonlight scene, where in a honeysuckle bower the noble lover draws a trembling girl unto his bosom, and pours into her ears the bewitching words of wild courtship, acted like magic on the reader's mind, and she became absorbed in the glowing picture.

The second and third chapters were soon perused, and she was entering with increased interest upon the fourth, when a sweet voice from the trundle-bed called out, "Mother, mother!"

Her ear caught the sound, but it made no impression upon her mind, till it had been several times repeated; then, turning quickly, in no very gentle voice she exclaimed, "What under the sun do you want, Lizzie? I thought you were asleep an hour ago."

"I have been asleep, mother," answered the little daughter, in a timid tone. "I waked up because—"

"Because you are a naughty girl, and wanted to plague me. Strange that I can't have a minute's comfort;" and, going hastily to the bed, she drew

the clothes around the child, and bade her shut her eyes and go to sleep.

"I want a drink, mother; I can't sleep, I am so thirsty."

The mother looked around; there was neither pitcher nor glass in the room.

"It's always just so. I never forgot to bring up water, but you were sure to want some. Why didn't you drink last night, when I had a whole pitcher-full for you?"

"I was n't thirsty last night. Do please give me a drink, and I'll go right to sleep."

"I am not going to run down stairs again to-night; so just turn over and shut your eyes;" and she sat down again to her novel, leaving the thirsty child to its thoughts or dreams, as the case might be.

Lizzie, as she said, wanted a drink very much, and so she turned, and tossed, and tried to think of everything but water, while that was all she could think of.

"If I only had one little swallow," murmured she to herself, "I guess I could get along till morning." But she might as well have wanted a pail-full; there was no hope or prospect of getting any. By and by, she spied, upon the stove-hearth, a tin cup. "The baby's milk!" said she. "Perhaps that would be as good as water. I wonder if mother would let me have it." She looked toward the parent. She was absorbed in her book; her very being seemed bound up in it. The child knew too

much to disturb her. But perhaps she could get it without disturbing her mother, and she did want a drink so much. She hesitated a while, then crept quietly out of the bed, stole to the cup, seized it eagerly, and took a swallow. But it tasted better than she thought it would, and her thirst was such, she drained it. Alarmed at what she had done, she was in such haste to put it down, that it slipped from her trembling hand, bounding against the stove, falling on the hearth, and rolling thence on the carpet.

"Why, Lizzie Lee!" screamed the mother, dropping her book and running to the child. "I should like to know what you've been about! spilt all the baby's milk, I'll warrant," as she took up the empty cup. Then, seeing the carpet was quite dry, she seized Lizzie by the shoulder, exclaiming, in an angry voice, "What have you done with the milk, you little plague? Tell me this minute what's become of it?"

"I was so thirsty, mother," answered the child, in a pleading voice, tears starting to her eyes, "I could not go to sleep, and so—"

"So you drank it, did you, you naughty girl?" continued Mrs. Lee with increased vehemence of tone; "drank it, and I have n't another drop of milk in the house. I'll teach you to do such things,"—and her hand came down heavily upon the shrinking shoulder, once—twice—three times! A wild scream of pain burst from the child's lips. Another

and another; and, angry and excited as the mother was, they pierced her heart as with sharp arrows.

The noise startled a younger child, who slept in the same bed with Lizzie. Frightened from its sound slumbers, it shrieked an alarm, when the babe, waking at the same moment, joined its voice with the others, not in harmony, but in one of those discords which echo so often in the nursery, stunning the ear and bewildering the brain.

With quick steps, quick hands and a softened tone, Mrs. Lee strove to calm the tempest she had raised. Lizzie's cries soon merged into piteous sobs, but Willie and the babe continued their loud screams, till the mother, in her perplexity, would fain have wrung her hands and sat down and wept with them. She run from one to the other, soothing, singing, entreating. But they would not hush in the least, till, as a last resource, she took the babe in one arm, Willie in the other, and, thus burdened, paced the chamber. Her limbs ached with the effort, her voice grew plaintive, her heart sad and sore with the upbraidings of a conscience she had strove too long to stifle. She breathed sweet music in the ears of the little sobbing creatures who struggled in her arms, but not a word of anger fell from her pale lips. She felt she was the guilty cause of all her trouble. A little forethought, a little self-denial, a little discipline of temper, and all had been well.

It was a long time ere she ventured to sit down and rock the children, and they did not soon close

their eyes in sleep. They would start and scream, then draw such long, sad sighs, that the tears which trembled in the mother's eyes would flood her cheeks.

When at last they rested in a sweet, calm slumber, she was at a loss how to put them down, to release her weary arms, without the risk of new confusion. There was no one whom she could call upon for aid. No one? Yes, there was the little, trembling creature, whose tender skin still smarted with the chastisement of an angry mother.

"Lizzie," called the mother, after a long while, in a very low, gentle tone.

The child was quickly beside her.

"Bring your little chair, and sit down close to me, and see if you can draw the baby on your lap without waking him."

Lizzie did as directed, and the babe was soon clasped to her heart, her lips breathing childish words of affection over its unconscious form.

Very carefully did Mrs. Lee lay down her little Willie, and for some moments she sat beside him, smoothing gently his fair brow, twining his golden locks around her fingers, and pressing the softest and sweetest of kisses on his still lips.

Then, going to Lizzie, she took from her arms the babe, and, placing it in the cradle, bent over it, whispering the fondest terms of endearment.

Sitting down beside it, she covered her face, and thought grew busy. By and by Lizzie stole quietly

to the chair, knelt beside it, and buried her head in the mother's lap. Mrs. Lee's hands toyed with the soft, brown curls that fell over it in such rich profusion, and several times pushed them off the forehead, when the child felt the mute pressure of her lips. For some time both were silent. At length Lizzie looked timidly up, saying, in a touching voice, "I am *so* sorry, mother, I made you so much trouble. I'll try and never be thirsty again when you are reading." The mother's heart started; she drew the child to her bosom, embraced it fondly, closely, as though she thought by pressure to still its painful throbbings. Then, bearing her to the bed, she sat her down, and hastily left the room.

She soon returned, a glass of water in her hand. "Thank you, mother," said Lizzie, when she had quenched her thirst; "*you will have a good time to read now*, for I shall go right to sleep."

With eyes brimful of tears, the mother bent over her child, and kissed her again and again. And Lizzie, feeling that she was quite forgiven, and not dreaming she had been more sinned against than sinning, threw her arms around her parent's neck, and gave back kiss for kiss. Then, nestling on the warm pillow of her little brother, she closed her weary eyes, and in a few moments was sound asleep.

For a long while the mother knelt beside the low couch, and when she rose and sat down again by the stand, she left the novel where she had dropped it,

but took from her basket an unfinished doll, and with rapid fingers plied her needle.

It was late ere she placed her head upon her pillow. When she did, the doll, completed and neatly dressed, lay by the side of Lizzie,— the novel, half-read, upon the Lehigh, in the stove, a handful of light ashes!

THE SLATTERN CURED.

"*En deshabillé* again, Helen?" said Mr. Ellis to his daughter, as she made her appearance in the dining-room, some fifteen minutes after the ringing of the bell; "I thought by your want of punctuality you were making a late toilet, but,"—pausing a moment to scan her more closely—"it seems that could not have been the case. What a fright you are! I declare, you are hardly decent! Were you a child, I should dismiss, without a hearing, the maid who allowed you to appear in such plight; and I have half a mind now, young lady as you are, to send you back to your chamber. It is bad enough to see you looking so at breakfast; but at dinner, too, is quite too much for my patience. You violate not only good taste and all the laws of etiquette, but the commandment of Heaven, to honor your father and your mother!"

A frown trembled upon the usually placid brow of the old man, and the flush of dissatisfaction reddened his cheeks.

The young girl whom he addressed made no reply, but her face wore a deep crimson, and tears gathered in her eyes. Choking down hurriedly a few mouth-

fuls of food, she rose abruptly, and, murmuring a wish to be excused, glided with fleet steps from the room.

"The most incorrigible slattern in town!" said her father, as the door closed on her.

"O, no, no!" responded his wife; "you judge her too harshly. She is not worse than a hundred others. It is a rare thing, in these days, to find a young girl who pays much attention to her dress when expecting to see only her own family."

"But that does not palliate *her* fault. Nay," he added, quickly, as he saw his wife about to answer, "don't say a word for her. She is entirely inexcusable. During the thirty years that we have lived together, I have never once seen you in attire that was not perfectly neat. And if you, with all your cares, can thus pay attention to your dress and person, I am sure Helen can. If she appears thus in her home, when her time is all her own, what will she be, how will she look, when the responsibilities of the housekeeper rest upon her? I tell you, wife, she is sowing the seeds of future misery. This going so negligently about the house, only dressing up when company is expected, or when going out, is one of the most fruitful causes of domestic troubles. No man can long respect a slattern; and, when once a man ceases to respect the woman with whom he associates (I care not in what relation she stands to him), he will not be apt to trouble himself much about her happiness. I wish I could make Helen

realize the trials in which her careless personal habits will involve her."

"She is young yet," pleaded Mrs. Ellis.

"Young! A poor excuse for a girl of nineteen appearing at the dinner-table in the attire she did. She is old enough to know that her old father ought to be honored as much, at least, as those whiskered dandies which frequent her parlor. I'd wager half my fortune, nothing on earth would tempt her to let one of them, brainless fops as they are, catch a glimpse of her in her usual breakfast and dinner costume. And yet, if I did not almost daily remonstrate with her on her habit, she would seat herself beside me in her slatternly undress, year in and year out, without the faintest approach to a blush."

The old man was silent some moments. When he again spoke, it was with such a bitterness of tone that his wife thanked God in her heart that *she* had ever made her family and their joy her first, chief duty.

"Glorious times, these latter days! Rags, filth and frowns for home; dress, beauty, smiles, for the street; curls for the stranger, tangles for the father; satins for the lover, calicoes for the husband!"

He paced the room several times with rapid steps, his hands pressing nervously his head, as though he were revolving some half-matured idea. At length he seated himself beside his wife, exclaiming, abruptly,

"I have it now. I believe I can yet cure Helen;

at least, I will hope till the experiment is tried. Cured she must be, if the thing is possible. She must be taught that it is the duty of a woman to respect the household in which she abides, as much as she does the acquaintances of a day. She is proud; proud of her beauty and of her taste, and that pride must and shall be mortified. It will be a bitter medicine, I know; yet she will one day bless the hand that gave it. I have preached till I am tired; now I will plot."

Slatternly enough was the figure of Helen Ellis, as she sat in her chamber. Her head, with its dishevelled tresses, seemed like the plaything of a high March wind; while her dress, minus half its hooks, was out everywhere except where it should have been — in the corn-field, scaring the crows. From the torn ruffle that dangled around her neck, to her slip-shod ties with their gaping seams, all was ragged. She would have made a good sign for a tin-pedlar; and, indeed, in her present attire, seemed fit for nothing else.

She was now weeping, and bitterly, over her negligent costume. The words of her father had stung deeply her loving heart; and she longed to throw her arms about his neck and beg to be forgiven; to whisper, also, that she would never again be guilty of the slattern's sin. But, alas! she had been forgiven so many times, she had broken so many vows, that she was ashamed yet again to plead and promise. So,

for the hundredth time at least, she resolved that nothing should tempt her to appear before her parents in a dress that was not perfectly neat; and then, sore with the upbraidings of a guilty conscience, she repaired to her toilet, and in a short time had so metamorphosed her appearance, that a stranger would scarcely have recognized her.

She was a beautiful young creature, and, being gifted with exquisite taste, knew how to heighten every charm. Every braid of her glossy hair was arranged with artistic effect; every ringlet drooped like a pencilled shadow; while every flower nestled, and every gem glistened, just where the lover of beauty would have wished them. Colors, fabrics, styles, all were scanned closely by her fastidious eye, ere the choice was made, and then she might have sat for a painter's study, so faultless was the drapery that clothed her girlish form. In the street, the soiree, the ball-room, wherever there was company, she was ever the model after which scores were copyists. But in her home, in the society of those who loved her most, at the side of her father and mother, she was — what, alas! too many young ladies are — a slattern. No worse, as her mother said, than a hundred others, but only, like them, the slave of a habit which, though sanctioned by fashion, is ever a curse to its victim.

For several days after her abrupt departure from the dining-room, Helen kept her vow to the letter. Her father did not fail to observe the change; though

the lessons of the past had well taught him it was only a temporary reform.

He entered the parlor one evening with an open letter in his hand, his countenance brilliant with joy.

"News from Edward?" exclaimed his wife and daughter, simultaneously.

"News of him," answered he. "His dearest friend, Frank Howard, arrived in New York yesterday, and will be with us in the course of a fortnight. It will be almost equal to seeing Edward; for he has been with him every day for the last five years. And now, Helen, if you want to make a conquest that will have some *éclat* attending it, prepare yourself. Young, handsome, rich, a traveller with Parisian accent and foreign *moustache*, who has dined with noblemen and looked through an opera-glass at the queen,—why, he is worth more than all your old flames, would outweigh them all in the balance of fashion! He remembers you, too, speaks of you as a fairy vision which dazzled years ago his rapt glances, and, in the next sentence, says that, wearied with travel, he shall settle in a quiet home of his own, as soon as he can find a bird to charm him with notes of love!"

Tapping gently the flushed cheeks of the young daughter, he asked in a gentle voice if she were ill, feverish he knew she must be, her face wore so bright a scarlet, and then he strove to feel her pulse; but, like a young fawn, she glided from him, and, gaining

her chamber, was soon revelling in dreams beauteous as the fancies of a poet's trance.

Frank Howard remembered her! Those words had opened a new fountain in her heart; and rich and sweet was the music of its crystal flood. A mere girl, at the green age of life when they had parted, she had never dared flatter herself that she lived in his memory; yet thus she had, and he who had been her ideal of a lover, spoke of her, though years had passed since he had seen her, as a fairy vision. An artist could have asked no lovelier subject for his pencil than the picture of Helen Ellis, as, bathed in the light of the harvest moon, she reposed on a crimson couch, her small hands folded passionately above her heaving bosom, her beautiful countenance radiant with the light of a first, an innocent love.

"It rains! I am glad!" exclaimed the young maiden who was bent on a conquest, as, drawing aside the curtains, she marked the gray sky and the pattering drops. "No danger of company to-day. What a fine time I shall have to embroider!"

Her breakfast hastily despatched, she took her work and bent steadily and diligently over it. It was a superb morning-dress, the material rich, the style unique, the fit perfect.

"Finished!" cried she, after several hours of industry; and then she proceeded to try it on. She blushed as she gazed in the mirror, conscious of the reason why she had been so choice of the new robe.

Frank Howard would probably arrive late in the evening, so late that he would not expect to see the ladies till morning. A breakfast-dress was the first in which she would appear to him. What wonder she had spent so many hours upon it!

The dinner-bell rung just as Helen was placing the dress in her wardrobe. Hastily donning the garments at her feet, she repaired to the dining-room. Never had she entered it in worse plight. She might have stood for the model slattern of the nineteenth century. No brush or comb had touched her hair since the previous evening. The back was a mass of tangled, frizzled braids, with here and there a hair-pin dangling, while in the front was a cluster of embryo curls, some rolled in white cotton, others in black silk, and a few in common newspaper. Her dress was that most unbecoming of all deshabilles, an old light silk, "tattered and torn," too short by several inches, and the skirt loose in two or three places from the waist, which latter had but two hooks. Her elbows protruded very unceremoniously from her sleeves, while every time she raised her arms the curious observer might note the quality of her linen. Her shoes were, as usual, down at the heels, and their once elegant embroidery stood now at loose ends. Black silk hose were the first she happened to see in the morning, and, without stopping to compare or contrast the color with her dress, she had hastily drawn them on, so hastily that in one of them a large rent was visible. The only

whole, clean article about her was a linen pocket-handkerchief, and that was not where it should have been, in her hand, but pinned awry around her neck.

There was no one in the room, and, after pausing a moment to scan the quality of the dinner,— for her taste was fastidious in more than one sense,— she turned toward the parlor-door to summon her mother, but, ere she had quite reached it, it was opened, and her father ushered in his wife and ——. Good heavens! what did she see? — a visitor, and, a single glance told her, one of the most elegant young men she had ever seen. A second look revealed the fact, too, that she had met him before, and, ere her parent had time to introduce him, she recognized in the stranger — Frank Howard!

The change from childhood to womanhood, together with her grotesque appearance, were good reasons why he should not remember her. Polished gentleman as he was, nature spoke out in a sudden start and a too earnest gaze, as the words, "My daughter," fell from the lips of Mr. Ellis. In truth, at the first glimpse of her, he had fancied it some mild lunatic, though he could not conceive why she should be allowed to appear thus before company. But, somewhat versed in fashionable life, the evident embarrassment and confusion of Helen revealed to him in a moment the true state of the case. The young lady was evidently "caught." This settled in his mind, his self-possession returned, and, drawing

gracefully her arm within his own, he led her to the table.

How she ever got through the meal, what she did or said, Helen could never distinctly remember. She was conscious of only two things — a fiery heat in her face, and a looking out for some loop-hole of escape. She was afterwards told that she had eaten her soup with a fork and her potato with a spoon; put jelly on her lettuce and sugar on her meat, mustard in her tumbler and vinegar on the cloth, and, oftener than she did aught else, wiped her eyes with a napkin.

She was pledged to the temperance reform, yet she wished then, and with all her heart too, that there was the good rare wine to detain the gentlemen, as in olden time. But, no; when her mother rose, they did likewise; and by the side, even hanging on the arm of Howard, she was forced to enter the parlor. He led her to one of the most inviting seats in the room; unfortunately for her, it was in a corner, and so disposed that to escape from it, without revealing to him the unhooked waist and the naked heel, was impossible. Her parents drew their chairs close beside her; so that, with them on one side and Howard on the other, she found herself a captive for the whole long afternoon. The guest had so much to tell them about the absent one, and they so much to ask, that neither tired.

Helen fancied that her father enjoyed her confusion, and this thought added much to her chagrin.

Indeed, he managed his plot so adroitly, that he not only obliged her to be led to the supper-table in the same slatternly attire, but afterwards to pass the whole evening in their presence, without the slightest opportunity to change or arrange her dress. Late, almost midnight was it ere she found herself again in her chamber.

That she buried her head in her pillow, and wept long and bitterly, will be conceived as a matter of course; but none save herself, or one who has passed through the same ordeal, could number the pangs of mortification that wrung her young heart, or the resolutions that took root there. No sleep sealed her eyelids that night. Thought, busy, earnest thought, was her companion; and its vigil did a holy work in the maiden's life.

She did not dazzle the eyes of Howard at breakfast with her splendid robe and neatly-braided tresses, nor did he have a glimpse of her during the three days that he tarried. But, months afterwards, he came with her father an unexpected guest to dinner; and, although a more stormy day is seldom known, he found her in attire so perfectly neat and elegant, her beautiful countenance, with its deep blushes, so bewitchingly shaded by the softest of auburn curls, that his heart leaped with joy, feeling that the fairy vision had come again.

The father's plot had indeed worked well. This practical illustration proved more effective than all his precepts. It was a bitter dose, though, as he

well said it would be,—so bitter that the recipient has never quite forgotten it; for the only subject upon which Helen Howard dislikes to hear her husband dwell, is the first dinner he eat, the first evening he spent, in her father's house, after his European tour.

"COMPANY EVERY DAY."

"There is no place like home," saith the song; but what say our youths and maidens?

THE family of Mr. Elton, with the exception of the eldest son, were assembled, one cold winter's evening, in what was styled by the household the little back chamber. They called it little, not only because its dimensions fairly entitled it to that adjective, but also to distinguish it from the back chamber of the main house. The little one was in an ell directly over the kitchen, and originally designed, one might suppose, to serve in the capacity of a safety-valve for it, as, whenever the steam, smoke, odor, or heat (which last, though, was not often the case) became disagreeable to the "hired help," she had only to open the back-stair door, and the lower room was speedily relieved of its surplus moisture, vapor, smell or caloric, as the case might be.

This little back room, which, by the way, had been the cause of considerable contention during the three years Mr. Elton had occupied the house, was of an indefinable shape. It was neither square nor round, yet it had both straight lines and curves. The

ceiling was low, and, in consequence of the culinary clouds which swept so often across it, of an iron-grey hue; while the walls, which, in common parlance, were "*whitewashed yaller*," had, from the same cause, assumed a shade similar to that which distinguishes an old cent.

The furniture was very simple, nothing but what seemed actually necessary finding a place there. The floor, or middle portion of it, rather, was covered with a rag carpet, in which one might see not only every color, but every shade of color under the sun; while the nooks and corners were pieced out with bits of oil-cloth, green baize, and worn-out druggets. An old-fashioned turn-up bedstead occupied one corner, concealed by curtains made from old calico dresses, and like delicate drapery shaded the two windows. A three-legged stand, which had been the crowning ornament of Mrs. Elton's grandmother's square room; five chairs, no two of which were alike, and all so antiquated and tottling as to lead one to suspect they came out in the Mayflower, if not out of the ark; a dumb stove, and a couple of wooden stools, comprised the inventory.

Everything was scrupulously neat, except the ceiling and walls; everything was in perfect order; and yet the room wore anything but an inviting look, and produced any other than a pleasant sensation upon entering it. One felt, when seated there, that he had a roof to shelter him; but as to farther sense of comfort, there was none. Yet this room, this little,

low, ugly, chilling, grease-scented hole, with its dingy, sweaty walls and antediluvian-like furniture, was, during the day and evening, used as parlor and sitting-room by all the members of Mr. Elton's family, and in the night as a sleeping-room for the two daughters.

Why, think you? Because it was the poorest, meanest apartment in the whole house, and it saved labor, time, light, fuel, wear and tear, and et ceteras innumerable, to occupy it as they did. And, moreover,— and this was the climax of all the reasons, and had been advanced time and again by Mrs. Elton, — "it kept the front part of the house in such nice order for company!"

This Mrs. Elton was a woman of many excellent qualities. She was a pattern housekeeper, active, industrious, frugal, neat. It would have been difficult to have gathered "a spoonful of dirt" in her whole house; there was never a dish appeared on her table spoiled in the cooking; never a garment laid away unmended; never anything lost or wasted. She was called, too, a model wife and mother. There was no man in the town whose linen was so white, or whose clothes were so well brushed and cared for, as her husband's; there were no children who, in appearance or behavior, excelled hers. Were her family ill, she forgot her own existence in the care she bestowed upon them, and, whether sick or well herself, labored for them incessantly, work seeming, indeed, the object for which she lived.

Much of their present prosperity was evidently owing to her good management and skill in household affairs. They had begun at the foot of the ladder, but, after a union of nineteen years, had left many a round behind them. They dwelt in a spacious, elegant house, furnished (one room excepted) with taste and splendor; had a comfortable sum at interest, and were doing a prosperous business. The world had looked on, and its comment had always been, "Elton is a lucky fellow; but no wonder, he has such a capital wife;" and more than one man had secretly envied him his treasure. Everybody told him he ought to be a very happy man; that his ought to be a very happy family! He thought so too, and tried to imagine they were; but years of stern reality had convinced him that such was not the case, and often he feared it never would be. And why? A reason there was; a strange one, too. He was Mrs. Elton's husband, and the young boys and girls that clustered around their fireside, her children. Do you stare? Let me state it then in another form: He and his children were only "*her own family;*" *they were not company!*

Mrs. Elton, with all her good qualities, and they were many and fine ones, belonged to that class (alas, that I should have to add it), that *large* class, who think nothing too good for company, nothing too poor for their family. There was no need of warming the parlors every day, and lighting them every evening, just for her own folks; the little back cham-

ber would do quite as well. There was no need of using the dining-room at every meal, spreading the table with a damask cloth and china and silver; and the kitchen, with coarse brown linen, cheap crockery and plated spoons, would do just as well when they were all alone. And so on, *ad infinitum*. Her own family must not take the comfort of their wealth, because, forsooth, something might wear out. Yet she would give parties, though the company did more injury to her house and furniture in a single evening than her own family would do in a whole year. A plain table would do for themselves, yet she would furnish an entertainment for visitors, the cost of which would spread their private board with luxuries for many months. She loved her husband and children dearly, but there was no use of making a fuss for *them*; that must be reserved for company. She must do her *duty* to her family, not strive to make their home a happy one. Her house must be pleasant when friends were gathered there; it was no concern of hers how dull when they were absent.

They were assembled, as I have said, one cold winter evening, in the little back chamber. Mr. Elton sat in one corner, his chair leaned back, his head resting on the wall, his arms folded listlessly. His eyes were cast upward with a steady gaze, rivetted probably on some imaginary picture, for that ceiling surely could not thus arrest them. His countenance wore one of those moody expressions, so difficult to

analyze, so unpleasant to behold. He had dropped off one of his slippers, and thrust one and then the other foot against the dumb stove, as though he thought by pressure to elicit from it some little warmth. A wise proceeding, in truth, for if there were any heat in that stove it was fair to conclude it was all latent; at least, so spake those blue noses and quivering chins. The model wife sat in an opposite corner, busily engaged in knitting. One might have supposed, to see her fingers ply, that a fortune depended upon her toeing off her stocking that evening. Around the stove were gathered the two girls and the youngest boy, all conning their lessons for the morrow. A goodly portion of the evening had been spent by them in a vain attempt to make their lamps give light without smoking. One would pick up the wick, and exclaim, "Now I can see a little better;" and another would draw it down, saying, "I shall be suffocated with the smoke." Finally, it would seem, they came to the conclusion that what could not be cured must be endured, and chose, what seemed to them the least of the two evils, a miserable caricature of twilight; — though once in a while, when a momentary pain flashed through their strained eyes, their lips would curl, and a keen ear might have detected escaping from them the words "cheap oil!"

A cold blast swept down the alley, and shrieked around the ell. An involuntary shiver ran over the

parents and children, and they looked hastily towards the stove.

"Do, for pity's sake," exclaimed the youngest girl, to her brother, "run down and put some wood in the stove. I don't believe there is a spark of fire. I've been half-frozen all the evening, and I shall soon be quite so, a perfect icicle, if somebody don't conjure up a little heat."

"I should think," said the elder one, in a tone purposely affected, as she looked up from her philosophy, "the mercury would hardly rise higher than zero here."

"It's well for you, then, sis, that you ain't a thermometer," cried the boy, in his blunt way. "Here, put on your cloaks," and he brought them from a closet, and threw them over their shoulders; "wrap yourself up in them a few minutes, and I reckon I'll steam up here some. Yes," apostrophizing the stove, "I'll warm your dumb tongue so it'll talk a little. Give us the light."

"The lamp, you mean, Ed.," said Fanny, rather dryly.

"O, yes, I forgot; there is a difference;" and he bolted down stairs, his mother calling to him, "one or two sticks will do, Edward; it's almost bed-time." If his ears heard the words, and it was hardly possible for it to be otherwise, his mind did not seem to comprehend them, for, furiously raking up the embers, and trespassing without mercy on the morrow's

kindling, he crowded in piece after piece, till he filled the stove with a generous warmth.

"I wish," exclaimed he, as he was running up the stairs; "I wish," repeated he, as he leaped into the room; then, as he put down the lamp and seated himself on one of the stools close to the stove, quite out of breath, he a third time cried out, "I wish—"

"Wish what, Ed.?" said Fanny. "Do, pray, take a long breath, and speak out."

"Well, then, I wish we could have company every day!"

The girls laughed, nevertheless exclaimed with one voice, "We 'll join you in that;" then, speaking the words slowly, as though she were all the while thinking, Mary continued, "If we only could have company every day!"

"What, children!" cried Mrs. Elton, and her mouth and throat were full of impressive sentences as to the folly of such wishes, when a sudden glance at her husband checked their utterance, and she swallowed, or, rather, choked them down.

"Why, children?" said the father; "why should you like to have company every day?"

"O, because," exclaimed Mary; "because, because," chimed in Fanny and Edward.

"Because what? Don't all speak at once. Come, Mary, as the eldest, I will begin with you."

"O, I have forty reasons, father."

"Say a hundred," said Fanny.

"A thousand, while you 're about it," said Edward.

"Well," said Mary, "I can sum them all in one sentence; I am so much happier then."

"Happier when strangers are around you, than when your beloved parents and sister and brother?" asked her father, a little reproachingly.

The tears gushed to her eyes. "You misunderstand me, indeed you do, father. It is not the company I care so much about, though I dearly love to see my friends; it is not that so much as the privileges we have then."

"What mean you by privileges, child?" and Mr. Elton darted a searching glance at his wife.

"Why, a great many things, father. For instance, that of having the parlors opened and warmed and lighted, and then sitting down in them and enjoying their comforts. I believe I should feel a great deal better if I could only spend all my evenings down stairs, amidst that elegant furniture, and gaze upon those superb pictures and ornaments, tastefully arranged curtains, and those charming frescoes. I should n't tease you to go out half so often, if we sat down there all the time; but up here—" she hesitated.

"Your father and I," said the mother, in a somewhat bitter tone, "would have been glad of so comfortable a room as this when we began the world."

"Well, mother, if we had n't any better room than this, if we could n't afford to have any other, I

should n't complain. As it is"—a long pause—"if ever I have a house, my family shall have the comfort of it—"

Fearing an outbreak from his partner, Mr. Elton interrupted Mary, by appealing to the second daughter for her reasons.

"Mary gave some, in what she said about the parlor. We often lay awake nights and paint pictures of them."

"Your brush? Your brush? sis," cried Ed., blunt as usual.

"Our tongues are our brushes, sir. They are not pictures for the eye to see, but for the heart to revel on; word pictures; home pictures, we call them. If we could only see them in reality, how happy we should be."

"What do you suppose, though," asked the lad, in a voice indicative of momentous thought, "what do you suppose, girls, would become of this little back chamber, if we should have company every day, and use the parlors?"

"O, I have it now;" and a roguish smile lurked in the corners of his eyes and his dimpled cheeks. "It would be a capital place for old Rover to sleep. It 's too bad to put him out doors such cold nights!"

"A fine opinion you must have of our bed-chamber, to think of turning it into a dog-kennel!" retorted Fanny, as though highly offended. Then, turning to her father, she continued: "You know, too, we always use the dining-room when we have

company, and it is *so much* pleasanter than that kitchen. I wonder, sometimes, that you can keep your patience there. Ellen is sure to have a half-dozen pots to scrape, and as many pans to make a clattering; and then she always takes that time to rake out her stove, and, in short, do everything that 'll make a noise; it 's a confusion of kettles, if not of tongues. And then we can never get through supper without having some strange body thrust its head into the door to know 'is thar eere a girl by the name of Ellen O'Leary lives with ye, mam?'" and she gave the accent perfectly.

They all laughed, even her mother, though she immediately smoothed her face, saying, "Many a one would be glad of so good a place to eat in."

"True, mother," rejoined the daughter; "but I say as Mary did of the parlors; if we had no better place, I should be contented; no, I can't say that, quite, but I should n't grumble. I always have, and I always shall say, there is no use in having money, if it don't increase our happiness. We might as well be poor, as to live all the time as though we were. But come, master Ed., let us have your reasons, your *thousand* reasons."

"Well, then; I declare, I don't know where to begin. O, the hall lamp is always lighted then, and I don't risk breaking my legs every time I come in. They are all black and blue, now, with poking through the dark. And then — well, everything is good-natured then, and that 's enough, of itself, to

make anybody wish for company every day. Besides, we always have good things to eat then, and don't have to eat them off of cracked earthen ware, either; and then,— well, the beginning and end of the story is, we have a first-rate time all round. I always give three cheers when I come in sight of the house and find the parlor blinds open. If ever I get to be a married man, I mean to call my wife and children *company*, so as to have a good time every day!"

"But tell me," said Mr. Elton, addressing the three, "if you could have the pleasures attendant upon the reception of company, without their presence, would you be as well satisfied?"

"Yes, yes, indeed," responded they with one voice. "We wish for company every day," said Mary, "because we should like to have our home pleasant and happy every day; and you know, father, —you have often said it, too,—it is the dullest place in all creation, when we are alone."

An awkward silence ensued.

Mary broke it by observing, in an anxious tone, "The reason that I have most at heart, father, for desiring company every day, is on account of brother George. He never goes out when we have company, but he never any more stays at home when we are alone."

The parents startled as Mary paused, and their hearts in a moment grew sad and anxious. They

d never thought of it before, but it was even so; d where was he now? It was ten o'clock.

"It is late," said Mrs. Elton, and she went to the ndow as though to listen.

"Yes, yes," murmured her husband, thoughtfully, I wonder where he can be."

Just then a voice, which, though rather husky, s yet musical, was heard trolling a coarse negro ng, and footsteps sounded upon the alley pavement. ey all rose and joined their mother. Could that George? George, whose taste in musical, as in other matters, bordered upon fastidiousness? The ging back of the kitchen door proved that it was They resumed their seats, and in silence awaited n. Through the lower room and up stairs he ne, now stumbling, now stamping, now whistling, w chuckling. As he came in, he burst into a loud gh, marched with a rowdy air through the cham-, rubbing his hands, and exclaiming, "Capital! it, Jim! first-rate! let 's have it again!" He med, as he was indeed, for the moment, uncon-ous of the presence of his family. They looked in mute amazement.

"Where have you been, George?" inquired Mary er a while, and there was a touching pathos in her ce. The brother did not notice it; he heard the rds; his brain was too misty to distinguish the e.

"Been! I've been to the circus, and a dev'lish e time I've had, too! ha, ha, ha! capital! go it,

old fellow! ha, ha, ha! But it was confounded hot; my blood burns yet;" and, going to the window, he raised the sash, and suffered the cold night air to fan his flushed face. Taking a handful of snow from the sill, he held it to his brow a while, when, as it began to melt, he rubbed it through his hair, till it hung in wet locks over his damp forehead. His long walk in the keen wind had cooled somewhat his fevered blood; his ablutions with the liquified snow, and the conscious presence of his family, aided in sobering him, —for he was only in the first stage of dissipation. His step was firmer, his countenance more rational, when he closed the window and again paced the chamber.

"I thought," said Fanny to him, as she rose and joined him in his walk, "I thought, George, you never went to amusements without some of us could accompany you. Pray, why did you go off to-night without taking us?"

"Take you!" he answered, in a sarcastic tone; "take my sisters to the circus! A fine place, indeed, for you!"

"If it was not a fit place for your sisters," retorted Fanny, with considerable spirit, "I am quite sure it was not a fit place for my brother. George, George," she exclaimed, passionately, grasping his hands, and wetting them with her tears, "promise, O, promise me that you will never go there again, nor to any place where you would be ashamed to see your sisters."

"Promise!" he looked around, then thrust her lely from his side; "no! I'll not promise. I'll there, and to places fouler far than that, yes, to dition itself, before I'll spend my evenings in such evilish hole as this."

Then, in a bitter tone — O, how long did it lin- in his mother's memory! — he exclaimed, "And en I come reeling home at midnight, my body, ath, words, soul even, filthy with sin, lay the guilt your own heart, my careful, prudent mother. u valued your fine house and costly furniture her than your son's happiness; reap your reward. re your nice things for company; reserve the use father's wealth for strangers; let it minister to the of out-door friends: your family, your sons and ghters, perhaps your husband, even, will trouble ı not long; *what they could not find at home, y will seek elsewhere;* yes, as I have done to- ht. Look at me!" and he paused before the mbling, weeping woman; "do I look like the boy whom you were so proud — the youth in whom ı centred so much hope? A drunken, swearing rdy, I stand before you. And you have made me yes, you, my mother. You would not let me l my joy at home, and so I went abroad."

There were tears, and sorrow, and anguish, that ht, in the Elton family. There were prayers, , deep, earnest, thrilling prayers, now quivering pale lips, now trembling far down in the soul's ret places, now gushing up from stricken bosoms,

lost to all, save the ear of God, by the wild sobs that checked their utterance. And one heart, torn and bleeding at every pore, wrapped its raw wounds in sackcloth and ashes, and threw itself before the mercy-seat. All the long, dark hours, it cried, "Forgive, forgive!" and when the morning dawned, contrite upon the bosom of the fallen son, it uttered still its prayer.

Heaven did forgive; the boy, too, and wiped away the mother's tears. But never from her memory was that night's experience effaced. Never again did she hear her children wish for "*company every day.*"

THE BROKEN WINDOWS;

OR,

THE "CROSS" AND THE "SORRY" MOTHER.

"WHAT, for mercy's sake, has happened now?" exclaimed Mrs. Layton, vehemently, as she was startled from her doze on the sofa by the shivering of a window and the scattering of the broken pane. "I'll warrant those little harum-scarums of mine are at the bottom of this. They were born to plague me, I really believe. There's never a day passes but they are in some kind of trouble;" and, rousing herself, she picked up the book, whose pages had mesmerized her thoughts and eyelids, and, with a step and air that told plainly she was sadly out of humor, hastened to the casement. On her way she stumbled, and a ball bounded before her.

"Just as I expected! They never had a plaything yet but they were sure to do mischief with it the first thing. But I'll punish them for this, the little torments! I can't see, for the life of me, what comfort there is in having children. If they are in the room with me, they tease me with their noise, and if they are out of my sight, they're sure to be

THE BROKEN WINDOW.

head and heels in trouble. I shall be glad when they 're grown up and out of the way;" and she closed her amiable and affectionate soliloquy, by giving the bell a hasty pull, and throwing herself, with an impatient gesture, into her rocking-chair.

"Where are the boys, and who broke the window?" said she, in an angry tone, to the domestic who appeared.

"In the kitchen, ma'am, waping hard; for, indade, ma'am, they niver maned to brake it; I saw it meself, ma'am, and I ashure ye, it was all the sheerest accident, and they be very sorry, ma'am—"

"Send them here, instantly," was the lady's interruption, in no mild tone either, to the attempt of the warm-hearted Irish girl to "plade the cause of the little innocents;" "and send for a glazier, too, and bring up a brush and dust-pan, and sweep up the bits of glass."

With a sad heart Mary obeyed the commands of her irritated mistress.

"Is she cross, and will she whip us?" exclaimed the two little boys,—the one five, the other seven years of age. "Say 'no,' do, that 's a good Mary! Did you tell her we did n't mean to, and was *so* sorry?"

"Yes, yes, my darlints; but ye must go to her, and mind ye, go quietly, too, my masters, and be sure to kiss her swately, and promise niver to be so careless agin;" and, wiping the sorrow stains from

their cheeks, brushing their hair and smoothing their tumbled sacks, she sent them "above."

Hand in hand, as though they fancied there was safety in each other's proximity, the little offenders ascended the staircase, and with slow and noiseless footsteps paced the hall, but halted at the parlor door. Fear whitened each little face, and shook each little, penitent heart.

"You go first," whispered Henry to the younger one. "She 'll forgive you, I guess, 'cause you are so small, and don't know any better, and then you can coax her to forgive me."

"No, no; I darsn't, 'cause I can't never speak right when I ought to," responded Frank, a shiver running over his delicate limbs. "You go first, you 're the biggest, and you ought to."

How long they would have tarried there, disputing in their childish way, and striving to wear a brave heart, we can hardly guess, had not their mother hastily unclosed the door.

"So you 've come at last, have you, you naughty boys!" exclaimed she, with anything but maternal sweetness hovering about her lips. "You 've come to get a good whipping, have you? I guess you 'll remember next time to throw your ball somewhere else than into the parlor window. Naughty boys!" and she dragged the tearful, speechless creatures into the room. "A whole dollar to pay out now for your careless trick. What do you think will become of us all if you go on so, breaking windows every

day? We'll have to go to the poor-house, and you'll be beggar children, with nobody to love you. Naughty boys!" And she went to a closet, and took from thence a "rod of correction."

"O don't, don't whip us, dear, dear mother," screamed both the children, as she drew near them. "We did n't mean to; we'll never do so again; we won't; we never broke one before; O don't, don't!" and they struggled vainly in her angry grasp. Heavily came down the weapon upon the shrinking shoulders, stingingly it swept across the quivering palms, while shrieks of "It hurts, O, it does hurt so!" were mingled with sobs so piteous that the servants below pressed their ears to keep out the echoes.

"There, now, I guess you'll behave after this, you naughty boys!" exclaimed she, as, out of breath, and hot, and flurried, she sank in her chair. "And now take yourselves off to bed, and that as quick as you can, too; and don't let me hear any noise up there, either, or I'll come to you again. If you can't mind without whipping, it's high time you were whipped till you do mind. Come, why don't you start?"

"Have we got to go to bed without any supper?" moaned, rather than asked, little Frank. "I am so hungry I shall die afore morning."

"I'll risk your dying. Yes, you've got to go to bed without supper. I must take what the supper

would have cost, and pay for a new light. See what comes of being naughty."

The children started, but on the threshold they paused, turned round, and stood irresolute, as longing, yet fearing, to ask a favor.

"What do you want now?" said the mother, in a tone that was still shrill and discordant.

"We want you to kiss us," faltered their white and trembling lips. "And we want you to forgive us, 'cause we never meant to, and we was sorry all the time."

"Kiss you! do you think you deserve to be kissed? No, I sha'n't kiss you to-night. I can't give my kisses to such naughty children. Go to bed, and pray to God to forgive you and make you good, that you may be a comfort to your mother, and not wear her life out with your bad conduct;" and she impatiently pointed to the door.

"Well, I go," said the elder one, with an angry twist of his sore shoulders; and he shut the door after him with a good deal more noise than was necessary; "and, perhaps, I'll pray, too; but I won't pray to God to forgive me, for I ha'n't been naughty at all; but I'll pray to him to give me a mother that don't whip, and that'll love us and kiss us." And, with hearts crushed and torn, the little ones sought their chamber, and strove to undress. A weary time they had of it, for their fingers were sore and swollen, and their eyes so blinded they

could hardly see button-holes, and much less the strings to their gaiters.

"I'll have to go to bed with my clothes on," moaned little Frank, as, pulling the wrong way, he drew his lacings into a hard knot. "O dear, I wish Mary would come!" and he burst out anew.

"She darsn't, 'cause mother won't let her," said Henry, as, giving an impatient jerk to his jacket, he drew it off with a sad rent, though, and the loss of a couple of buttons. "Here, I'll help you off with your things," and, taking out his penknife, he severed, with little ceremony, the Gordian tie, and, with a twitch here, and a pull there, succeeded, at length, in stripping his gentler brother.

"We ha'n't said our prayers," said Frank, as Henry leaped into the bed.

"Well, I a'n't agoing to say 'em either," responded the other, in an angry tone. "It's no use trying to pray when you feel so ugly,—the minister said so, the other day; besides, my hands and shoulders ache so, I can't think about anything but that old whip. She did whip us awful hard, didn't she?"

"Yes. O, it did hurt, though, and it hurts now; but I guess I'll just pray to God to make her love us, and never whip us when we don't mean to be naughty."

"'T won't do no good to pray that, Frank; 'cause when she's so cross she don't think about God, nor nobody else."

"Well, old granny used to say, 'if it don't do no good it won't do no hurt to pray, and it 'll always make you feel gooder than it did before.'" And so the little child, though every nerve within was quivering yet with pain, and though he was tired and hungry, just in that frame of body and mind when he needed to be folded to a mother's heart, and kissed and lulled with the holy music of her evening hymn, knelt down and folded his red, smarting hands, and prayed to the good Father, not only to make him and his little brother good boys, but to make their mother love them, and never whip them again when they did n't mean to be naughty. If ever the recording angel was tempted to blot out a mother's sin, it must have been when that prayer was heard in heaven.

There was a holy, beautiful look on the face of the suffering child as he raised it to his brother's. His old granny's words were true, he felt "gooder" than he did before that knee was bent, before that petition was lisped. But he could not make his brother feel so. Dark, revengeful feelings were boiling in that young heart, and they bubbled over soon in expressions like these:

"I think it was real mean in mother to whip us, when we did n't mean to do nothing bad. What if we did break a window? Father has got plenty of money to pay for it; and if he ha'n't there is no use in making such a fuss about a dollar. I wish we 'd broke two, we might just as well. It's her own

fault, too; if she'd let us play in the parlor with our blocks, it would n't have happened. She need n't have half killed us if she did think she must whip us. I wish I was a big man, I'd clear out somewhere, and never come back. I wonder if everybody's mother is so awful cross. O dear!" but here his voice melted into sobs again, now wild and convulsive, stirring the whole frame, then deep and passionate, choking the throat, and again so low and mournful that they seemed but the audible pulses of a breaking heart. But healthy childhood has ever a true and gentle comforter for all its woes, and the little boys, in an hour's time, were fast asleep, their veined eyelids fearfully swollen, though, and their fair brows and rosy cheeks sadly stained with the efforts of their little fingers to wipe off the scorching tears.

"The careless little things," grumbled Mrs. Layton, as, going through their chamber an hour after midnight, on her return from a brilliant party, she tumbled over their scattered clothes. "*I verily believe the more I whip them the worse they grow.* How glad I shall be when they are old enough to take care of themselves and keep out of my way." And the "cross" mother, without a single prayer for the beautiful gifts God had vouchsafed her household, without one kiss upon the fragrant lips of those precious babes, without even a glance towards the little couch which had given rest to the limbs she had so cruelly tortured, hurried to her own room, and

hurried to bed. God read her heart; I am glad I cannot.

"Mercy on me! What has happened? What is the matter?" exclaimed Mrs. Brown, in a half-frightened tone, as she was roused from a light doze in her chair by the shivering of a window and the scattering of a broken pane. "Who could have done that? Who could have been so careless? I hope, I trust it was not my little boys; and yet it would be nothing strange if it were they, for they are but children, frolicsome, light-hearted children; and I can't expect them always to do right. I am sorry, though, that it has happened, very, very sorry." And picking up the sewing, which excessive fatigue alone had caused her involuntarily to drop, and drawing her hand across her weary eyelids, as though she would fain efface the drowsiness which still lingered there, she hastened to the casement, hoping to find it in such a condition that her own skill could repair the fracture. But, alas! all in vain were her efforts to fit the tiny bits — China cement nor painter's putty could mend that shattered thing; it was a hopeless ruin.

"I shall have to give it up," moaned she, in a sad voice, as she failed in her third trial. "I shall have to give it up and get a new pane set. I am sorry, too, for I can ill afford the money now, and I am *so* tired, it does not seem as though I could sit up to-night to earn it. Yet there 's no use in fretting over

it. It's done, and I must make the best of it. If it would only teach the little ones to be more careful hereafter, I would n't mind it so much after all. Poor things; it's only a little while you'll be children, and it would be hard, indeed, if your mother could n't bear with your thoughtless acts for a few short years. O, if they are but spared to me! How could I live without them." And then her voice was hushed, but her lips moved, and the waiting angel bore a touching prayer to heaven.

There was a calm and beautiful expression in her countenance as she turned from the window. Love had triumphed over that petulant spirit which hovers ever so closely above the mother's cares and patience. "God's kindliest angel" had lain its white fingers on her worried heart, and "it complained no more." Getting her brush and pan she swept up the scattered glass, watching, with a mother's anxious eye, lest she should miss some tiny particle, and thus endanger the safety of their little feet, whom poverty compelled to go nearly all the time without stockings or shoes.

She did not go out to seek the children; she did not even call them. She had read their young hearts too many times to fear for them in the present crisis. She knew that though they might hesitate for a time, it would not be long ere truth would lead them,— it might be with streaming eyes and a sobbing voice, yet lead them to her side. So she resumed, quietly, her accustomed seat, and her worn

thimble, and commenced again that "stitch, stitch, stitch," which earned for her, and her fatherless babes, their scanty living.

An hour passed on. Then the gate swung to, and the patter of little bare feet was heard on the steps.

"They are coming," murmured she, a pleasant smile weaving beautiful lines across her pale, sad face, and the light of her eye glowing with diviner lustre. "They are coming; I knew they would. Poor little things, I pity them; they will be so sorry;" and she waited eagerly to hear the latch raised.

Some moments passed ere it was touched; then it rattled, but the door was not pushed open. A low, sad sound, as of sobs and broken words, mingled in the same note, stole upon the ear of the patient watcher. The tears gushed to her eyes.

"Poor little things," breathed she again. "You do love me dearly, indeed, or you would n't feel so sorry. If we was n't so poor I should n't mind it a bit, for it was an accident, I know." And again that mother's heart of hers excused them both, and again the waiting angel bore a pleading prayer.

The latch rattled a second time, but the door was left unmoved. In a voice that was tremulous with emotion, but sweet as the song of a bird at sunlight, she called:

"Henry, Frank! Is it you, my little boys? Come in, if it is; mother wants to see you."

Ere the last words had died on her quivering lips, the door was swung open, and the children bounded into her opened arms, burying their faces in her bosom, and nestling close to her throbbing heart. Not a word was spoken, but, as they felt themselves wound up so closely in her dear embrace, their tears wiped off so soothingly, and their hot brows cooled by such loving kisses, they knew and felt they were forgiven. Not a word was spoken; but, as she felt their slender arms about her neck and waist, saw their swollen eyes and stained cheeks, and marked the suffering look they wore, she knew and felt that the pulse of love beat high in their young breasts.

She was worn and wearied, yet for a half hour she sat and held them on her knees, rocking them with a gentle, lulling motion, and, after the first gush of feeling was over, singing to them snatches of holy hymns, between each of which she paused, half unconsciously, to press their lips and breathe over them words of love and prayer.

The striking of the clock aroused her from her blessed trance, for oblivious had she been in body and mind to all her cares and sorrows and fatigue; and blest, indeed, in the inspiring confidence that her little ones were true to her and to themselves, and, best of all, that she was true to them.

"It is supper time," said she, sweetly. "We have been so happy here in the old arm-chair, that I had not noticed it was so late. Who will get me the wood to-night?"

"Both of us! both of us!" exclaimed the little ones; and, leaping from her lap, they bounded out to the shed and returned in a trice, each begging to build the fire.

"Let Henry build the fire and fill the kettle, and I'll draw out the table, and Frank may set it."

For a moment the children hesitated, and looked wistfully into each other's eyes. Poor little ones! Knowing their mother's poverty, they had resolved, ere they came in, not to eat any supper, that she might not feel so severely the penalty of their thoughtless act; but now their keen appetites of childhood combated with fearful activity the good resolution. They drew near each other, and Henry whispered,

"Shall we tell her?"

"Yes, I guess so; but I'm awful hungry, a'n't you?"

"Yes; but so much the better. It would n't be any punishment, you know, if we went without when we was n't hungry. I guess I'll tell her. It'll show her better how sorry we are."

Then, with a most musical tremble in his voice, he spoke up,

"You need n't put up only the leaf, mother, to-night, 'cause we don't want any supper."

"What's the matter?" asked she, striving to be calm; "don't you feel hungry?"

There was silence for a moment. Then, running to her, they bowed themselves at her knee, while

their little hearts were turned inside out. They told her how that at school that day all the boys but them had balls to play with, and how bad they felt because they had n't any, and how their playmates told them to go home and ask their mother to buy them some, and how they told each other they would n't say a word about it to her, for she had enough to buy without getting balls; that, as they were coming home from school, they found some smooth, round stones, and they thought they 'd do first-rate, and were so glad that they got almost crazy, and forgot how many times she had told them never to throw anything towards the house, and that they were so scared when they heard the window break that they ran off into the woods, wondering what they should do.

"We don't mean," said Frank, with a beautiful earnestness, "we don't mean what we should do so that you need n't find it out; but we did n't know what we should do to make it up to you!"

"We knew you 'd be so sorry," said Henry, "and we knew you 'd have to work so hard to pay for it, that we were most grieved to death. But, after a while, we thought if we did n't eat any supper, and did n't eat very hearty to-morrow, 't would make it up; and, as soon as we said that, we came right off here to tell you. But we did feel so bad when we got to the door and thought how sorry you 'd be! But, mother, we'll try and remember never to do so again!"

"I hope you will remember it, my children,"

said she, tenderly but earnestly, "for twenty-five cents is a great deal for me to lose. It's all I've earned to-day. We must be very careful of our money or we shall get behindhand, and I can hardly tell what will become of us then. But I don't want you to go to bed without your supper to-night, for I am going to have a good one, and I should n't enjoy it alone. Old Uncle John called here to-day, and made me a present of a slice of his nice ham and a dozen eggs. Won't that be nice?"

"I guess it will!" rejoined the little boys. "Ham and eggs! won't it be good?" and merrily pattered their little feet out doors, and down cellar, and into the pantry, and wherever mother sent them; and, when supper was ready, two brighter-eyed, rosier-cheeked, happier-faced children could not be found in the whole township. Nor ever did a happier mother ask a blessing on a meal than she who presided at that board, so humble that ham and eggs were a rare luxury.

When the happy meal was over, and the tea-things washed and replaced again, as was her wont, she drew them to her side, and, after telling them some stories, which they never tired of hearing, about their sainted father, she read to them from their Sunday-school book a pretty story, and then an appropriate selection from the Scriptures, and went with them to their little chamber, and assisted them to undress. Very careful were the little ones that night to see that their clothes were hung up in the

most precise order, and very quietly came they and knelt beside her to repeat their evening prayer. Fervently did she press them to her bosom when it was over, and sweeter kisses never passed between the lips of a mother and her darlings than were given to and fro on that happy night.

"What a good mother she is!" exclaimed Frank, as the door closed upon her.

"I guess she is," said Henry. "She is the best mother I ever knew in all the world. She's always *sorry* when we do anything naughty, but she a'n't never cross nor ugly. I don't believe she knows how to be cross."

"Well, I am glad," responded the little brother, with emphasis. "Would n't it be awful, though, to have a cross mother and a dead father! How I wish he'd lived; then she would n't have had to work so."

"Mother says we must n't say so, because God would n't have taken him if it had n't been right. But I shall be glad when we're grown up big, so that we can take care of her. She's got to live with me in the summer, Frank, because I'm going to be a farmer, and the country'll be the very best place for her in warm weather."

"Well, she may; but she shall be with me in the winter time, 'cause I'm going to keep a big store in the city and have lots of money. O, won't she live nice and easy then! How I wish I was big. I'm

such a little fellow, I 'm 'fraid it 'll take so long before I get to be a man that she 'll get sick and die."

"O, I guess not!" was the hopeful answer. "At any rate, we 'll be good every day while we 're little, and then, if she don't live, why, she 'll have a good story to tell father about his little boys that he used to love so dearly. And we must n't *never*, NEVER throw anything towards the house again, must we?"

"No, we must n't, sure; but if we do we 'll tell her of it, won't we? 'cause she 'll never be cross, but only so sorry."

Many a beautiful air-castle then did the little ones build, and in each there was a chamber for mother, with plenty of gold and plenty of love. And when, at last, slumber sealed their eyelids, it left them locked in each other's arms, with an expression on each lip that would have well become the angel dead.

Their mother had not spared the rod and spoiled her babes; but she had bent it over them with such a holy hand that it had budded in her grasp, and left upon their young hearts, not sore and crimson wounds, but the impress of green leaves and the dew of flowers.

"The dear little creatures!" exclaimed she, in a thrilling tone, as she entered their chamber an hour after midnight, "*the more I love them, the better they grow.* How sorry I shall be when they are no longer all my own."

Then she knelt down beside their humble bed, and

tendered many earnest thanks to God for the beautiful gifts vouchsafed her household. Sweet and holy kisses she pressed afterward upon their lips, and the little ones smiled in their slumber and dreamed that an angel was bending over them. Then, with an aching brow and wearied limbs, the mother sought her couch and forgot herself in sleep. God read her heart; I wish I could.